

FINAL

NORTH FRUITA DESERT MANAGEMENT PLAN



U.S. Department of the Interior
Bureau of Land Management
Grand Junction Field Office
November 2004





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November 8, 2004

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**NORTH FRUITA DESERT RECREATION ACTIVITY MANAGEMENT PLAN
AND
GRAND JUNCTION RESOURCE MANAGEMENT PLAN (RMP) AMENDMENT**

Environmental Assessment # CO-130-02-08

Type of Project: Development of a Recreation Activity Management Plan to address issues, and determine goals and objectives for the management of the area, and an RMP Amendment to adjust motorized use designations and apply the No Surface Occupancy stipulation under the minerals program to recreation developments.

The North Fruita Desert is bounded by East Salt Creek on the West, Coal Gulch on the North, 21 Road on the east, and the BLM/private land boundary on the south, Mesa County Colorado.

Date of Preparation: 2000 - 2004

SUMMARY

The 72,656 acres of public land in the North Fruita Desert area were identified as part of the Grand Valley Intensive Recreation Management Area (IRMA) in the Grand Junction Resource Area Resource Management Plan (RMP) in 1987. This RMP recommended additional planning in the area, more active supervision of recreational uses, designation of one open area for off-highway vehicles (OHV) use, and provided for enhanced resource protection. The area's close proximity to Grand Junction and Fruita makes the North Fruita Desert increasingly valuable for dispersed recreational opportunities. The area is commonly used by residents of Mesa County but is experiencing increased visitation from throughout the region and out of state, as regional recreational opportunities are increasingly publicized.

Recreational opportunities present in the area include off-highway vehicle use, vehicle driving for pleasure, mountain biking, horseback riding, camping, hiking, hunting, shooting, and viewing scenery and natural features. OHV's are limited in the RMP to existing roads and trails. Outcomes from recreational visitation include rapidly-spreading primitive camping, vehicle parking in new and inappropriate locations, driving cross-country, litter and associated resource impacts, conflicts with other land uses, and visitor safety issues. The goal of the management direction presented in this plan is to afford protection to the resources present in the North Fruita Desert area while still allowing for a variety of recreational and commercial opportunities.

Representatives from various user groups and concerned parties with an interest in and knowledge about the area formed the North Fruita Desert Citizen Ad-Hoc Committee in August of 2000 in order to participate in planning for the future management of the North Fruita Desert Planning Area. The ad-hoc committee was sanctioned by the Northwest Resource Advisory Council (NWRAC) and operates under the NWRAC's charter. This group consisted of representatives of the Colorado Plateau Mountain Bike Trail Association, Mesa County Cycling Association, Grand Valley Mountain Bike Patrol, Grand Mesa Jeep Club, Motorcycle Trail Riding Association, Bookcliff Rattlers Motorcycle Club, Western Slope ATV Association, City of Fruita, Colorado Environmental Coalition, Sierra Club, Colorado State Parks, landowners, grazing permittees, other users such as horseback riders and shooters, and representatives from BLM's NWRAC. Approximately 20 meetings with either the ad hoc committee or a trails sub-committee and one field trip were held between August 2000 and Oct. 2003. BLM coordinated with the North Fruita Desert Citizens Ad-Hoc Committee during this time to formulate a vision statement, goals and objectives, and management recommendations for the area. The recommended management actions in this plan were formulated in an attempt to direct public use to appropriate areas, protect natural resources and define the lands and transportation routes being utilized by visitors. Staff wrote the draft plan in 2003 and the draft was published. After a 60 day comment period BLM reviewed the comments and conferred with other agencies while preparing the final plan, released in August of 2004.

The following management plan contains the management goals, objectives and management direction and actions agreed upon by the Bureau of Land Management (BLM), and the North Fruita Desert Citizens Ad-Hoc Committee.

The management actions in the final plan incorporate the comments received from the public in response to the draft plan. Grand Junction Field Office staff also had input in selecting the best alternative and formulating the actions.

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I. INTRODUCTION

A. PURPOSE

Recreation resource management decisions for the Grand Junction Field Office (GJFO) were detailed in the Grand Junction Resource Area RMP in 1987. The Grand Valley, including the North Fruita Desert, was designated as an Intensive Recreation Management Area (IRMA). The RMP recommended the need for additional planning for the IRMA due to its distinguishing characteristics and significance to recreation. The North Fruita Desert management plan fulfills the obligation of the GJFO to complete a site-specific plan for this area. It establishes management objectives and identifies management strategies to achieve those objectives. The North Fruita Desert Management Plan is consistent with the GJRA RMP and its amendments, and BLM management policies and is an integrated, issue-driven plan in that it addresses all major resource disciplines present in the area and the issues associated with them. It is also consistent with direction for recreation actions encapsulated in Recreation Guidelines to Meet Public Land Health Standards on BLM Managed Lands in Colorado (2000), as well as the BLM National Mountain Bike Strategy, the BLM OHV Strategy and the BLM Priorities for Recreation and Visitor Services, (the Purple Book).

B. LOCATION

The North Fruita Desert Planning Area is located in Mesa County, Colorado, five miles north of Fruita. The area is bounded by the East Salt Creek on the west, 21 Road on the east, Coal Gulch Road on the north, and the BLM/private land boundary on the south.

C. NATURAL SETTING

The North Fruita Desert area encompasses a 13 mile portion of the Bookcliffs as well as several major drainages (Big and East Salt Washes) which flow out of the Bookcliffs across the desert and into the Colorado River. The soils of the project area are developing primarily in Mancos shale bedrock and alluvium. Nearer to the Bookcliffs, alluvium washing from the shales and sandstones of the steep Mesa Verde Formation cliffs above have a pronounced influence, and soils have sandier textures, with stone and cobble present. The erosion potential for soils in both the Grand Valley and Bookcliffs areas is high.

The North Fruita Desert area receives approximately 10 inches of precipitation annually. Precipitation peaks in the spring (April-May) and in the late summer (August-September). Temperature extremes range from over 100 degrees Fahrenheit in summer to a very rare -20 degrees Fahrenheit during the winter months.

D. BACKGROUND

Access: The project area's close proximity to the urban population of Grand Junction and Fruita has made it increasingly valuable for dispersed recreation. Public lands within the planning area are accessed by Highway 139, and Mesa County Roads 16, 18 and 21. As specified in the 1987 RMP for the Grand Junction Resource Area, motorized vehicles are permitted only on existing roads and trails, except for one OHV open area which is a 400-acre parcel on the east side of 18 Road immediately north of the Highline Canal.

Neighbors: Approximately 7,610 acres within the planning area are privately owned by a variety of landowners. These parcels vary from unfenced and unoccupied desert to lots with buildings and habitations on them. Roads and trails accessing these private tracts, and the lands themselves, are commonly used by the general public because most private land in the area is not signed as private. This office has recently received a right-of-way request for an eight-inch potable water pipeline into the south end of the privately owned lands. One can assume this pipeline is a precursor to development of those lands.

Colorado State Parks manages Highline Lake State Park, which is immediately to the southwest of the project area, and provides opportunities for boating, fishing, swimming, camping, picnicking, and hiking or mountain biking on marked trails. Because the state parks intensive camping use is largely during the summer, while camping popularity in the North Fruita Desert peaks in spring and fall, Highline Lake serves as a natural adjunct for camping in the area. Highline Lake State Park provides a three and a half mile loop around the lake for non-motorized use, and linkage with trails on BLM-managed land is a priority with the park manager. With its on-site, emergency-trained law enforcement rangers, the park serves a search and rescue and emergency medical function for visitors on surrounding public lands.

The Bureau of Reclamation (BOR) has on-the-ground jurisdiction over public lands withdrawn for authorized water control purposes, which include flood control dams, water diversions and the two mile stretch of Government Highline Irrigation Canal to its intersection with the Grand Valley Irrigation Company Canal. Administration of BOR operations is shared with the Grand Valley Water Users Association. A 1983 memorandum of understanding allows for BLM grazing management on BOR withdrawn lands. The potential exists for other BLM-managed specific purposes such as recreation to be allowed within the withdrawn areas, but that would require a supplemental agreement to the MOU.

Generally, on BOR-administered withdrawals, lands are closed to recreational off highway vehicles unless opened through a public process. BLM has the opportunity, through the MOU, to allow for other uses on the right-of-way (ROW) lands as long as the primary water purposes are not adversely impacted. However, there have been past problems connected to public recreation use of BOR lands and facilities including potential liability (the Water Users Association does not feel the Colorado Recreational Liability Release Statue provides adequate protection from liability), vehicle access across dam structures not designed for that load, increased siltation into the canal from OHV activity, and shooting damage to the dam outlet structures.

Visuals: The North Fruita Desert area south of the Bookcliffs is in an undesignated visual resource management (VRM) category. That portion of the planning area in the Bookcliffs is designated as Visual Resource Management Class III. The objective of this class is to partially retain the existing character of the landscape. A noticeable degree of change is anticipated from land management activities but is in an area where visual change will be reduced through reasonable constraints in project design and mitigation.

Recreation: Visitation is highest during the spring and fall months and declines during the winter and summer months. Off-highway vehicle riding and mountain biking are predominant uses. The North Fruita Desert area is commonly used by residents of Mesa County due to its close proximity to Fruita and Grand Junction and easy, low elevation, year-round access. In the last five years, due largely to publicity generated by the Fruita business community, the area has become very popular for mountain bike riding. A trail system on either side of 18 Road next to the Bookcliffs has been developed that is attracting riders from all over the country. These trails were user-built without BLM environmental review or authorization. In 1994, there were fewer than 500 mountain bikers who used the trails at the end of 18 Road. Nine years later, (2003) it is estimated that some 20,000 mountain bike riders a year use the trails in this area. This represents an increase of 4,000 percent. A majority of those users who come from outside of the Grand Valley also camp overnight in the vicinity of the trails. It is not unusual to encounter 20 to 30 separate camps on a busy spring weekend, mostly located at the end of 18 Road. Overall the planning area attracts about 50,000 total recreational visits each year.

The level of discovery and subsequent use is creating resource deterioration, user conflicts, and visitor safety problems. Adverse resource impacts include unauthorized spur routes, scattered camping areas, parking in new and inappropriate locations, driving cross-country, and continued construction of unauthorized trails. In addition, litter,

human waste, and the negative impacts associated with unmanaged camping, and recreation use is resulting in degradation of the vegetative cover.

BLM, in partnership with local bicycling groups, has constructed a bicycle trailhead facility complete with shade structure, vault toilet, and informational kiosk towards the northern end of 18 Road, and has initiated management of the 18 Road camping area. However, the need for intensive management to preserve resource qualities and recreation opportunities continues to be evident.

Minerals:

Oil and Gas: Most of the active wells within the North Fruita Desert Planning Area are along the exterior boundary. There are several wells within the area that have been inactive for several years. In the near future, the operators of these wells will be contacted and decisions made to either plug them or leave them in their present state. If some work is done on these wells, then there will be heavier vehicle activity within the planning area for a period of time. This will include large trucks, work-over rigs, service trucks, water trucks, and probably some upgrade to the present access roads to these wells. If the wells are plugged, then reclamation and rehabilitation of the well sites will also include abandoning the roads. The process to plug these wells and/or put them on line will likely take several years.

A cluster of wells on the eastern border of the area, connected by pipelines to natural gas source wells located in the Bookcliffs, serve as natural gas storage reservoirs. During the spring and summer, natural gas is pumped into these underground storage wells. With the onset of colder winter temperatures, gas is pumped out of the storage wells to serve the heating needs of much of the Grand Valley.

Under the present situation a variety of special stipulations are applied to leases in the project area.

Stipulation	Acres applied to
No Surface Occupancy	5607
scenic and natural values	16613
Steep Slopes	8539
water quality (perennial streams)	218
deer and elk winter range	8239
threatened and endangered habitat	8534

Coal: The area of the Bookcliffs north of 18 Road has seen significant coal leasing and production activity. In 1981, BLM issued three coal

leases for 15,000 acres to Dorchester Coal Company. Dorchester followed this up with a development plan which would have linked a mine portal on private land with a haul route utilizing 18 Road, and would have included placement of surface facilities on public lands below the portal site near the end of 18 Road. A lack of demand for coal short circuited implementation of the development plan, and the mine portal was closed and reclaimed, leaving an underground 800 foot mine entry adit still intact. Recently, interest has been shown in portions of the old Dorchester leases. If the mine portal was reopened and development of the leases resumed, heavy hauling activity on 18 Road as well as ancillary facility development would preclude use of the campground and on many of the bicycle trails in this area. In the Grand Junction Resource Area RMP, mineable coal in the Bookcliffs area is “acceptable for further leasing under the federal coal leasing program.” Additional acreage along the face of the Bookcliffs was made available in the Grand Junction Resource Area RMP to accommodate any surface facilities that might be developed in conjunction with any leases.

Sand and Gravel: Historically, small quantities of sand and gravel have been sold in the north Fruita area. As such, sales are discretionary and BLM can ensure that such sales do not adversely impact natural resources in the area.

Wildlife:

Wildlife is not abundant in the North Fruita Desert, yet the diversity of species is surprisingly rich, although diminishing. Mule deer use a majority of the planning area including the higher areas of the North Fruita Desert adjacent to the Bookcliffs for winter range. Approximately seven sections northwest of the planning area, adjacent to the Bookcliffs, is within critical deer winter range. The area also contains wildlife species of special concern. The following are three of the state and federal animal species on a list under Federal and State Endangered Species Acts and three BLM sensitive species that have been documented to exist in the North Fruita Desert Planning Area.

Animals: Bald Eagle – Regularly hunts rabbits and prairie dogs here, on Federal Endangered Species Act as threatened.

Burrowing Owl – State threatened species, requires prairie dogs, great decline in last five years.

Ferruginous Hawk – Rare, may no longer nest in the area.

Great Basin Spadefoot Frog – Breeds in ephemeral pools in Little and Big Salt Washes.

Longnose Leopard Lizard – Uses prairie dog holes in or next to greasewood stands.

There is no sage grouse habitat in the North Fruita Desert area and no sage grouse. An expansive list of the wildlife species of the North Fruita Desert is contained in Appendix B. The annotations with each species assists judgments on impacts and species needs.

Plants:

The area contains several plant species of special concern. The following is a listing of the state and federal plant species of special concern.

Grand Valley Buckwheat – locally abundant, yellow flowers dominate some hillsides in May.

Cliff-Dwellers Candlestick (Tall Cryptanth) – scarce, and scatter distribution.

Nevada Onion – appear in small concentrations.

Riparian: Drainages with riparian characteristics include East Salt Creek (all), Big Salt Creek (scattered occurrence within the private land areas), Coal Gulch, and the upper portions of Little Salt Wash.

Soils: Local geology has played a dominant role in the types of soils that have developed in this area, and the topography in which they occur. Marine shales and sandstones of the Mancos shale formation are the primary parent materials; sediments and colluvium from the Mesa Verde formation, which forms the upper escarpments of the Bookcliffs have also influenced soil development and characteristics. Soils developing in Mancos shale materials are generally high in salts and sodium, and have textures high in silt and clay. Often a thin, fine sandy loam surface horizon is present. The soils have slow permeability rates; concentrated runoff from storm events or snowmelt usually causes the most erosion and sediment production, primarily from the existing gully systems. Where the more sandy and stony alluvium or colluvium from the Mesa Verde formation is present as pediment or ridge surface material, soils do not have the high salt/alkali levels associated with the Mancos formation, soil textures are sandier, and permeability is much greater. These soils are subject to more rapid erosion from recreational causes. Vegetation cover, however, is generally greater than that on the Mancos-derived soils, and erosion from natural sources is generally lower.

Watershed studies document a three- to eight-fold greater rate of erosion and sediment production from the Mancos shale exposures (Badlands) and from moderately to steeply sloping, shallow Mancos shale-derived

soils than from less sloping soils, soils derived from sandier materials, or those with better vegetative cover. The Badlands, Persayo, and Chipeta soil map units yield the highest rates of soil loss (7.5 to 15.0 tons of sediment per acre) while the Avalon, Youngston, and Uffen soils on average undergo 1.8 to 3.0 tons of sediment loss per acre. A great number of check dams, gully plugs, range pitting, and other sediment control/runoff retention measures have been applied to the North Fruita Desert area and the area adjacent to the east. This has been in response to RMP goals and basin-wide legislation addressing the need to reduce salinity in the Colorado River. Reduction of sediment (and the salts it contains) is an ongoing concern, and BLM management of the Mancos shale areas will continue to receive scrutiny, particularly in view of the effects of salinity on water quality regarding threatened or endangered fish species, agricultural use, and drinking water.

The entire area has been mapped for soils (Mesa County Soil Survey and the Douglas Plateau Soil Survey) at the Order III level, which affords enough detail to assist in the planning of recreational opportunities and use of the area. Physical and chemical properties of the mapped soils are also available.

Water: The North Fruita Desert management planning area encompasses portions of the Salt Creek, Big Salt Wash and Little Salt Wash watersheds. Tributaries to Salt Creek include Mack Wash and Coyote Wash. Big Salt Wash tributaries include Coal Canyon, Dry Gulch, Lippan Wash, Layton Wash, and East Branch. Tributaries to Little Salt Wash are unnamed. The reaches of these tributaries within the planning area are ephemeral, so flow is in response to convective summer storms and snowmelt. Limited water quality data is available for these systems because they are generally dry. Data collected by BLM in Big Salt Wash on the north end of the planning area indicate elevated total dissolved solids (TDS), with the major ions including sodium, magnesium, and sulfates. The mean TDS was nearly 1,100 milligrams per liter (mg/l). As the streams flow to the south across the Mancos shale the TDS levels increase, as evidenced by the mean TDS on East Salt Creek above the canal at nearly 3,400 mg/l. No suspended sediment data has been collected but visual observation indicates extremely high levels are common during runoff events. Levels over 300,000 mg/l have been measured on West Salt Creek. Similar concentrations probably occur in the washes/creeks within this area. Channel cross-sections on Big Salt indicate significant channel erosion occurs during some runoff events.

The Colorado River Basin Salinity Control Act (PL 93-320) was enacted in June of 1974. Title I of the act addresses the United States commitment to the Water Treaty of 1944 with Mexico. The Colorado River Basin Salinity Control Act was amended in 1984 by PL 98-569. PL 98-569 included direction to the BLM to develop a comprehensive program for

minimizing salt contributions from lands under their management. Studies conducted on Mancos shale in the Upper Colorado River Basin have demonstrated a positive relationship between sediment yield and salt production (Schumm, et.al., 1986). Sediment yield increases as a result of either upland erosion or streambank and gully erosion. Upland erosion is attributed to rill and inter-rill flow. Salt and sediment yield are dependent upon storm period, landform type, and the soluble mineral content of the geologic formation. Badlands are the most erosional unstable, with sediment yields as high as 15 tons per acre (U.S. Department of Agriculture, 1976). Rilling accounts for approximately 80 percent of the sediment yield (U.S. Department of the Interior). Because salt production is closely related to sediment yield and the badland soils have not been leached of their soluble minerals, they produced the greatest amount of salt of the various landform types. The Soil Conservation Service in 1977 estimated the Grand Valley annually contributed 2.9 million tons of sediment, and 600,000 to 700,000 tons results from erosion.

Archaeology: The North Fruita Desert is characterized by a very low density of cultural resources. This doubtless reflects the harshness of the arid local environment and the consequence of natural resources available to prehistoric hunter-gatherers. These conditions probably prevailed throughout the Holocene era. A considerable portion of the area has been inventoried for cultural resources. Any ground-altering projects will be subject to a Class III inventory and appropriate mitigation efforts as mandated by Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act.

Paleontology: Due to eons of erosion which has effectively covered any lower strata, there are few paleontological remains on the valley floor. Recreational collecting for petrified wood, vegetative, and non-vertebrate fossils does occur along the cliff faces and on top of the Bookcliffs.

II. ISSUES AND CONCERNS

Early in the planning process, the North Fruita Desert Citizen Ad-Hoc Committee generated a list of primary issues and concerns. In the order of importance they are as follows.

1. How to increase law enforcement to reduce trash dumping, under-aged parties, and vandalism.
2. Conflicts amongst mountain bikers, motorized users and other users (horseback riders, ranchers, shooters, hunters etc.).
3. Over-restriction of users.

4. Proliferation of unauthorized roads and trails from both motorized and mechanized visitors.
5. How best to pay for management actions (user fees for management of the area).
6. Resource damage due to large numbers of overnight campers.
7. Uncontrolled shooting.
8. General environmental damage from all uses.
9. Conflicts between mountain bikers and motorized users.
10. How not to restrict certain users because of other users mistakes.
11. Large increase in traffic on 18 Road and associated impacts (dust, road conditions, safety concerns, etc.).
12. Rangeland management.
13. Declining wildlife populations.
14. Lack of respect for private land.
15. Domestic or feral dogs in the area during livestock calving - impacts on wildlife.
16. Erosion control on trails.
17. How to increase fines for violating regulations.

Out of these issues, a vision statement and goals and objectives were developed.

III. VISION STATEMENT

The following vision statement was developed and adopted by the citizen ad-hoc committee.

The North Fruita Desert will provide opportunities for a wide variety of motorized and non-motorized recreational activities and benefits while maintaining compatibility, through education, among differing user groups. Recognizing the area is strongly tied economically and socially to the greater Fruita area and the

lower valley, the area will continue to contribute to the economic viability and stability of traditional uses as well as to the quality of life for valley residents. Opportunities for human activities will be provided while protecting or enhancing the area's environment and natural resources such as soils, native vegetation, and wildlife populations. The common safety of all users will be emphasized and cooperative educational programs will be utilized to instill proper land use values and ethics.

IV. MANAGEMENT GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

The following management goals and objectives were adopted by the citizens ad-hoc group. The goals and objectives of the planned management actions are to:

- A. GOAL: Protect and maintain sustainable ecosystem functions and cultural integrity while providing traditional and modern uses in the area.
 - 1. Objective: To maintain soil quality and vegetative stability through management of motorized and non-motorized trails and livestock.
 - 2. Objective: To coordinate all special motorized and non-motorized events where all parties are responsible for the integrity of the land.
 - 3. Objective: For all people to respect the area and range improvements through education.
 - 4. Objective: Protect water quality and yield.
- B. GOAL: Achieve a compromise between all user groups which takes into account that human activity and humans are natural and that human impact on our environment is inevitable, recognizing that there are a diverse number of ways the land should be used and benefited from.
 - 1. Objective: To give all user groups equal recognition with regard to multiple use resource management objectives and actions.

2. Objective: Establish a more reasonable application protocol for competitive recreational events that all users follow.

C. GOAL: Encourage responsible recreation in such a manner that leads to maintained or improved land health.

1. Objective: Coordinate the use of all recreation interests to see improved land health through a proactive and enforceable management plan.
2. Objective: Provide for educational and informational opportunities for user groups.

D. GOAL: Maintain biodiversity.

1. Objective: Protect and maintain valuable community parameters, natural resources and wildlife habitat.
2. Objective: Restore sensitive areas heavily damaged by human activity.
3. Objective: Reduction of impacts by motorized and mechanized vehicles and horses in areas critical to wildlife and native plants.
4. Objective: Reintroduction of wildlife and native plants to key areas.

E. GOAL: Decrease conflict between users.

1. Objective: To foster responsible use due to shared education and word of mouth about how important the area is to all of us.

F. GOAL: Continue to include opportunities for shooting in such a way as to reduce conflicts concerning safety of other users and livestock.

1. Objective: Increase safety by addressing open shooting by looking at possible actions with minimal restrictions.

FUNDING: Obtain needed funding for prescribed management actions.

1. Objective: Explore all possible funding options and select the best method(s) of funding each action. Accomplish this within 60 days after final management decision.
2. Objective: Form a group that would be responsible for working with BLM staff on specific options chosen.
3. Objective: From the chosen funding options, pursue and obtain funding for each management action within two years of decision.

V. MANAGEMENT ACTIONS AND DIRECTION

Overview

The following management action will be implemented to address the issues and concerns pertaining to certain program areas. The specific management direction and actions are those that best accomplish the planned management objectives and are the most compatible with the resources present in the North Fruita Desert. Management direction was derived from numerous meetings with the North Fruita Desert Ad-Hoc Committee and a core team of specialists from the BLM as well as public comment in response to the draft plan.

The ROS classification of Roaded Natural applies to most of the project area, and will not be changed. This allows for a generally natural environment with moderate evidence of the sights and sounds of man. The 400-acre OHV open area is classified as rural. This classification is characterized by a substantially modified natural environment. Resource modification and utilization practices are obvious.

Recreation

- A. Communication among the various user groups and private landowners will be encouraged. Periodic roundtable discussions among the user groups to settle problems will be held on an as-needed basis.
- B. Camping will be managed through construction of a defined primitive campground located at the end of 18 Road. This campground will be designed to handle 35 to 40 sites. Sites will be clustered around open vault toilets. The sites will be hardened for use and the main campground loop road and access spurs will be delineated with barriers. (see map 1)

1. The 35 to 40 sites will be designed to branch off the main campground loop road on 30 to 35 foot spur roads. Each site will be approximately 30 feet by 30 feet. A picnic table and fire ring will be placed in each site.
2. During construction of the camping sites and the access spurs, an estimated 20 to 25 small juniper trees may be removed to allow for adequate site sizing.
3. The main campground loop road will be hard surfaced with a base covered with a gravel top. Suitable barriers will delineate the roadway to prevent vehicles from wandering off road.
4. Access spurs to the campsites will be gravel surfaced and delineated. The end of the access spurs will allow for parking two or more vehicles per site.
5. Camping sites will be located no more than 250 yards from a vault toilet. Sites will be clustered so that one toilet services six to 10 sites. Toilets will be Class C type with an underground vault, a toilet throne, and a wooden screen around the toilet.
6. Three present sites located toward the south end of the eastern camp spur will be closed to relieve pressure on the nearby trail. The east campground spur road will be connected to loop with 18 Road.
7. A kiosk with camping, regulatory, and Leave No Trace information will be installed near the entrance.
8. Within the bicycle emphasis area camping will be allowed only in the designated sites.
9. Monitoring during permitted events and busy seasons will be used to define further campsite and management needs.
10. Open solid fuel campfires will be permitted in the fire rings provided in each designated campsite only. No cutting or gathering of native vegetation will be permitted. The use of liquid or gas cooking fuels is allowed.

11. Overnight camping fees may be charged and all collected fees would be returned to the campground to be used for maintenance and services. Partnership agreements to help BLM in the management and collection of fees will be sought.
 12. Encourage visitors to use private camp areas and Highline Lake State Park.
 13. Implement a low impact camping program, i.e., a pack-it-in-pack-it-out approach would be used to manage the refuse issue.
 14. Revegetate areas previously damaged by overnight camping.
- C. Target shooting (any device that propels a projectile, paint gun, archery, etc.) would be managed in the following ways:
1. The bicycle emphasis area will be closed to target shooting, except for the lawful taking of game. (see map).
 2. BLM will consider the designation of shooting sites if one or more responsible shooting groups demonstrate a desire to share with BLM in the long-term management and clean-up of shooting areas.
- D. Manage 18 Road in the following manner:
1. Work with Mesa County to increase the frequency of maintenance, post speed limit signs, and periodically gravel the road and/or spray a dust control agent on roads.
 2. Manage the parking area just off of 18 Road currently used by mountain bikers (gravel parking area, kiosk and visitor information board, toilets, and shade cabana). This project was completed in 2002 with the installation of a concrete vault toilet.
- E. Competitive and Organized Events
1. Competitive and organized events will be considered through the BLM's Special Recreation Permit (SRP) process. Events that would adversely affect the existing trails or existing uses would not be permitted. In order to protect trails, stipulations governing competitive, commercial and event permits would include language

allowing for the cancellation or alteration of routes in case of inclement weather. A reclamation bond may be required of permittees as well. Monitoring both before and after events will be used to assess impacts attributable to the activity. Post-event rehabilitation and future permit stipulations would be based on monitored impacts. BLM retains the discretion to limit the number of participants in any given activity.

2. Routes for these purposes would be limited to designated routes.

F. Emphasis Areas

1. Two emphasis areas would be designated: 1. A bicycle emphasis area would be located at the northern end of 18 Road, and 2. A hiker/equestrian emphasis area would be designated as non-motorized and non-mechanized except for administrative and emergency use. The southern boundary of the bicycle emphasis area has been redrawn from the location shown in the draft plan. The new location was selected to allow motorized visitors access to multiple use trails from the northern trailhead and to more easily manage the interface between the adjacent areas. (see map 1)

G. Garfield Mesa

1. The draft plan refers to potential multiple use trails that may be developed on Garfield Mesa. The location is out of the planning area for this plan. The subject will not be addressed by this plan.

H. Rehabilitation of the Site

1. A lockable gate will be erected at the entrance to the county gravel site off Highway 139 to protect the ongoing rehabilitation of the site. (see map 1)

Trails and Travel Routes

- A. Two different general travel management prescriptions were considered for the draft plan: The “*Encourage, Prohibit, Allow*” (EPA) prescription and the *designated routes prescription*. Both are described below. Under both prescriptions cross country travel (off of identified routes) is prohibited.

The EPA prescription: “Encouraged” routes are existing trails that form loops and connections and offer attractive recreational trail opportunities. These will be marked on the ground and on hand-out maps to allow for easy visitor orientation. “Allowed” routes are secondary trails that will be marked on hand-out maps with less line weight and not signed on the ground. These routes are identified solely to facilitate navigation. “Prohibited” routes will be closed. Typically these routes enter private lands and public access will be denied through signing. “Encouraged” and “Allowed” routes outside the bicycle emphasis area will be open to all types of vehicles, although single-track trails will be limited to vehicles less than 32 inches wide.

The designated routes prescription: In this prescription all routes will be designated as open, closed or administrative. Colorado standard travel management signs will be used. Administrative access will be provided to commercial sites (gas wells, range improvements). Desirable loop trails will be prominently signed. Trails in the bicycle emphasis area will be restricted to non-motorized use only, except for administrative and emergency needs. Outside the bicycle emphasis area all trails will be open to all uses with the exception of single-track trails. Single tracks will be open to hikers, bicyclists, equestrians and motorcyclists only. All closed routes will be signed closed and systematically rehabilitated as resources allow. If increases in use are indicated through monitoring, designated route restrictions may also be applied to equestrian and foot traffic as well.

- B. The North Fruita Desert will be managed using the designated routes prescription. All routes, shown on the attached maps, in the bicycle emphasis area will be designated upon the signing of this plan and publication of legal notice in the Federal Register. All other routes will be managed using the EPA prescription on an interim basis. As all other loop trail opportunities are constructed and opened for public use, they will become the designated routes. Selected routes will be closed or restricted to administrative only status within 9 months from the date of full force and effect of the plan. (See the implementation schedule on page 27). At the conclusion of the three year implementation period all routes will be designated as open, closed or administrative routes.

1. Roads and trails entering private land will be signed "End of Public Route, Entering Private Land." Trail-end signs would be located on public land, far enough from public/private land boundaries to allow vehicles to turn around on public land.
2. New shared-use, single-track trails will be constructed in the following locations: (see map1)
 - a. One and one half miles of trail connecting Coal Gulch Road with 16 Road, to the north of private property.
 - b. One mile of trail following a wash that intersects V.70 Road
 - c. Four miles of trail off the ridgeline immediately to the south of Coal Gulch Road. This route will be seasonally closed on the same schedule as Garvey Canyon.
 - d. Three and one half miles of trail following Coyote Wash and trail segments further to the east with the intent of connecting Highline Park to the North Fruita Desert trails and to relocate most OHV traffic away from the BOR water control structures and the Highline Canal.
 - e. Two miles of trail parallel to 18 Road, located 1/8-mile east of the private inholdings, diverting traffic away from private lands and Big Salt Wash.
3. New bicycle, single-track trails will be constructed in the following locations: (see map 1)
 - a. One mile of trail connecting between the eastern extension of Vegetarian Trail and the Edge Loop Trail at the base of the Bookcliffs.
 - b. One mile of trail to the east of Prime Cut Trail that would accommodate beginner-to-intermediate bicycle riders on a north/south route.
4. The OHV open area just north of the canal on 18 Road will be developed to, a) control the spread of activity in the area, b) allow for trailhead facilities for the motorized visitors, and c) allow for proper use and Tread Lightly information to best inform users of expected behavior. Actions include the following:
 - a. Fencing the outer boundary of the open area.
 - b. Fencing approximately two and one half miles north along the east side of 18 Road.

- c. Fencing approximately one mile along the north side of Q.50 Road.
 - d. Installation of a vault toilet.
 - e. Installation of a trailhead facility near the intersection of 18 Road and Q.50 Road with a kiosk to orient visitors to the area, encourage proper use ethics, and inform visitors of pertinent information.
 - f. All fencing would be designed to allow for the passage of antelope. Fencing would be three wire with a smooth bottom wire. Wire spacing would be 18 inches, 30 inches, and 42 inches as measured from the ground.
5. Sections of the southern half of Zippity Doo Dah bicycle trail, have a soil erosion problem. The trail will be rerouted and/or re-constructed. Until this work is completed, the trail will remain open to bicycle use.
 6. The existing rope-assisted bicycle route down the pour-over in Lippan Wash is considered a liability and safety hazard. The rope will be removed and an existing stock trail by-passing the hazardous point would be upgraded and extended to allow for safe passage.
 7. Additional trails throughout the planning area will be considered by the BLM, after the implementation of the actions described in this plan, subject to the agency's environmental analysis process and consistency with this plan. All users, whether motorized, mechanized, horseback or afoot, will be encouraged to present trail proposals to BLM for evaluation as future designated routes. After the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) process is complete, user groups, supervised by BLM staff, will be given the opportunity to construct and maintain new authorized trails.
 8. All new, unauthorized routes will be closed with signs and physical blocking and then rehabilitated.
 9. Existing routes that are part of a designated trail system but do not meet BLM standards will remain open until suitable relocated/alternative routes are available. Routes will be evaluated and repaired or relocated on a five-year planning schedule.
 10. BLM will discuss with BOR, on an annual basis, issues surrounding recreation impacts on the Highline Canal. At that time actions will be considered to protect the canal and its

infrastructure. Routing of recreational trails will be the major tool used to discourage vandalism. Other physical protection measures will be considered as problems are identified.

- C. Bicycle and motorcycle use on designated trails within the bicycle emphasis area would be separated as much as possible with one exception. Motorcycle and bicycle traffic heading east on Coal Gulch Road would follow existing oil and gas service roads (T. 8 S., R. 100 W., Sections 30 and 31, T. 9 S., R. 100 W., Section 6, and T. 9 S., R. 101 W., Section 1). The present trail from Ross Ridge into Lippan Wash will be abandoned and reclaimed. This trail will be replaced with a newly constructed single track trail meeting BLM guidelines. The Lippan Wash Trail will be re-worked so that the motorcycles will use the bottom of the wash to the degree possible and a new trail winding in and out of the wash will be constructed for the bicyclists. At the eastern edge of the bicycle emphasis area, the trails would split with the bicyclists routed west on Edge Loop. One and one-half miles of new single track will be constructed for the motorcyclists to route them to the east-west trail in T. 9 S., R. 101 W., Sections 3, 4, 5, 6, 8, and 9. The Lippan Wash Trail will be closed seasonally to allow for the free movement of wildlife from the tops of the Bookcliffs to winter range in the pinyon-juniper forests at the foot of the cliffs. The closure will start on December 1 of each year and last no longer than April 1. The closure may be shortened in years with moderate conditions. BLM will consult with DOW on the length of the closure.

Signing

- A. Kiosks will be posted at 10 key entry points leading into the area, at the two trailheads and in the campground. The kiosks will inform the public about opportunities in the area, regulatory information, as well as wildlife, recreation and safety. The designated trails prescription will be explained and a map will be available for distribution to the public. Recreation routes would be continuously signed on the ground. Closed and administrative routes will be signed at intersections.

Information Communications and Education

- A. Develop a brochure for the area detailing the “designated route” management prescription. Signing and restrictions will be explained to the public. Emphasis areas would be included so that

visitors can identify areas suitable for their activities. The map will also indicate closed routes and areas closed and/or restricted to overnight camping or shooting, as well as ethics messages. Ethics messages will be provided to local shops selling outdoor products, mountain bikes, motorcycles, and firearms.

- B. Local high schools will be visited on a periodic basis to emphasize ethics messages. Under the auspices of the Fruita Kiwanis Club, a cooperative effort has been set up to foster high school students' involvement in clean-up and special projects.
- C. Outreach education will be conducted on a periodic basis for schools, clubs, and organizations.
- D. The Mesa County Sheriff's Office and the Lower Valley Fire Department will be consulted in establishing helicopter landing zones within the area for search and rescue and emergency extraction needs.

Grazing

- A. Where gates are currently located, cattleguards would be installed for better livestock management and ease of public access.
- B. On all printed materials such as maps, brochures, and bulletin boards, information would be provided to inform users about grazing use in the area, in particular the time of year that calving takes place. By voluntarily separating recreation and grazing operations it is anticipated that conflict between the two groups would decrease.
- C. Support land owners and permittees efforts to protect private land.

Wildlife

In order to address wildlife issues, the following management actions will be implemented:

- A. Colorado DOW will be actively involved in all future analysis of proposed routes and facilities in the project area. DOW will comment on impacts to wildlife and hunting that may occur as a result of a proposed action.

- B. Several locations in the project area have high concentrations of prairie dog towns. A survey conducted in the 1970's provides historic data about the locations of prairie dogs at that time. DOW will assist in monitoring and advise BLM on other actions that will improve the health of these towns.
- C. Maintain the existing vehicular exclosures, including the 72-acre Harvester Exclosure, to allow studies of the native biological processes and productivity.
- D. Information about wildlife and the effects of humans on wildlife will be included in the interpretative information and handouts available to the public. The negative impact on the life cycle of deer and trail impacts when used during wet times and during severe winter conditions will be pointed out.
- E. Hunting information will be included in the recreation portions of the visitor hand out material
- F. The Lippan Wash Trail will be seasonally closed from December 1 until March 15 each year. The new construction trail parallel to Coal Gulch Road will be seasonally closed consistent with the Lippan Wash Trail. The opening date may be moved to an earlier or later date if conditions warrant. The public will be directed to use Hunter Canyon as an alternate route to Lippan Wash during the closure period.
- G. No new trail construction will be considered in the pinyon-juniper stands at the base of the Bookcliffs west of Big Salt Wash or east of Lippan Wash.

Vegetation and Soils

- A. Areas where resource damage occurs may be closed for recovery purposes.
- B. Re-seeding with native species may be used if beneficial in reducing the monoculture of cheatgrass that dominates the area.

Realty

- A. Trails entering public land would be signed "End of Public Route, Entering Private Land." Turnarounds would be located on public land.
- B. Where feasible, work to purchase or negotiate ROWs and or public use easements across private lands to improve access onto public lands.

Minerals

- A. Oil and gas leasing will continue throughout the project area. Stipulations will apply to some areas as shown in the chart on page 10. Additional protection of proposed or existing recreation facilities is discussed below. Recreation sites, where there is BLM facility investment will be protected from surface on-site oil and gas development. This RMP amendment will allow a no surface occupancy (NSO) stipulation to 80 acres surrounding the trailhead and 200 acres surrounding the campground if the area is nominated for lease again. The open OHV area at the southern edge of the planning unit (T. 9 S., R. 101 W., Section 9) is available for leasing, It is not leased at this time but is included as part of the Fruita Gas Storage Agreement (COC 047628). Although the probability of a drilling project at that location is unlikely, the amount of development, if it should occur, can be designed to be compatible with use of the area for OHVs. If found to be necessary, BLM may approach the agreement proprietor, Xcel Corporation, to try and reach an agreement to minimize any proposed development impacts to the OHV area.

- B. The proposed campground and existing trailhead area will be protected from future coal and oil and gas operations by a NSO lease stipulation. The following are the legal descriptions of the NSO. The campground is 200 acres: Lot 9, SW $\frac{1}{4}$ NE $\frac{1}{4}$, N $\frac{1}{2}$ SE $\frac{1}{4}$, SW $\frac{1}{4}$ SE $\frac{1}{4}$, Section 30, T. 8 S., R. 101 W., the trailhead is 80 acres: Lot 11, Section 31, T. 8 S., R. 101 W. and Lot 2, Section 6, T. 9 S., R. 101 W., all within the 6th P.M. However, if coal surface facilities were to impact the campground and trailhead, a special stipulation on the coal lease, right-of-way, or other authorization would require the coal company to replace the facilities by funding the re-location of the campground and trailhead. If the coal mine surface facilities are proposed within the campground and/or trailhead area designated as NSO, the NSO requirement may be waived or reduced in scope if the coal company pays for the re-location of the campground and trailhead, as noted above, or if the lessee can demonstrate that operations can be conducted without causing unacceptable impacts. Presently 34 percent of the planning area is leased for minerals.

- D. Requests for saleable products such as rock, sand, and gravel would not be authorized at, or adjacent to, BLM recreational facilities on the north and south ends of 18 Road.

VI. ADMINISTRATION AND MONITORING

- A. Interested organizations and user groups will continue to be encouraged to establish cooperative programs for the patrol and maintenance of the area and to help prevent irresponsible use, trash, and vandalism problems through a heightened presence and public education.
- B. A monitoring system will be established to analyze recreational impacts. The monitoring data will furnish baseline information for future land-use decisions and management actions consistent with plan goals and objectives. Periodic monitoring will be conducted by field office personnel.
 - 1. Monitoring will include visitor contacts, resource inspections, and routine patrols.
 - 2. Photo monitoring of selected locations will aid in the evaluation of impacts. Photographic trend plots, designed to document changes in plant cover and erosion, will be employed to evaluate the effectiveness of the management methods prescribed in the plan.
 - 3. Visitor counts and questionnaires will be used as part of the ongoing monitoring.
- C. Recreation management decisions concerning designation modifications and recreational facility/trail proposals would be evaluated periodically. Representatives from interested user groups will be asked to participate and comment during the review process. Decision-making criteria, including visitor numbers, user complaints, user conflicts, quantity and variety of recreation uses occurring, types and numbers of recreation violations, proliferation of unauthorized routes, changes in visitor needs, and documented resource damage, will provide the basis for recreation management determinations. Final determinations will be approved by the Field Manager.

VII. FUNDING

Through its access to construction and maintenance funding, the BLM intends to invest \$190,000 into implementing this plan in FY2005.

The following funding sources outside of the BLM's regular allocation process will be sought to help pay for implementation and maintenance of this plan and to extend federal funding.

- A. BLM will consider the collection of a nominal camping fee for overnight use of the campground sites at the end of 18 Road. Fees would go directly to upkeep and maintenance costs of the campground. The BLM will seek partners in managing the campground.
- B. State grants and Great Outdoor Colorado (GOCO) funds will be applied for by the user groups, as well as the BLM.
- C. Fees will be collected from special events that take place in the area, i.e., Fruita Fat Tire Festival, Bookcliff Rattlers race, etc.
- C. Donations of volunteer time and funding will be accepted from the various user and special interest groups.

Implementation Plan

- A. Actions scheduled for the FY 2005:
 - 1. Fencing of OHV open area.
 - 2. Construction of trailhead at 18 Road and Q.5 Road. Included in this are sanitation issues and an information kiosk.
 - 3. Lippan wash trail and Zippity Doo Dah upgrades and reroutes.
 - 4. Construction of fence on east side of 18 Road and to the north of Q.5 Road.
 - 5. Construction of the campground at north end of 18 Road with information kiosk.
 - 6. Signing of bicycle emphasis area (designated routes).
 - 7. Signing of all routes outside MTB area with EPA signing.
 - 8. Continue to work with user groups to obtain outside funding through grants and partnerships.
- B. Actions scheduled for the FY 2006:
 - 1. Sign all entries with information kiosks.
 - 2. Construct all loop trails west of 18 Road and convert to designated routes west of 18 Road. Will route closures west of 18 Road.
 - 3. Construct new routes in MTB area.
 - 4. Begin upgrade of MTB trails in emphasis area.
- C. Actions scheduled for the FY 2007:
 - 1. Construct Coal Gulch Trail single track trail.
 - 2. Construct all loop trails east of 18 Road and convert to designated routes

3. All routes will be managed using the designated routes prescription with the completion of all of the loop trail development, signing and fencing.
4. Route closures east of 18 Road.

VIII. APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

LIST OF ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

IRMA:	Intensive Recreation Management Area
RMP:	Resource Management Plan
RAC:	Resource Advisory Council
GJFO:	Grand Junction Field Office
OHV:	Off-Highway Vehicles
DOW:	Colorado Division of Wildlife
ROS:	Recreation Opportunity Spectrum

APPENDIX B

WILDLIFE OF THE NORTH FRUITA DESERT

This is a selective, annotated list of the wildlife of the North Fruita Desert Area and north of Highline Canal. Species other than those listed also occur but are considered too peripheral to be significant.

Mammals:

Yuma Myotis: BLM sensitive species, uses desert ponds and Big and East Salt Washes.

Pallid Bat: Uses desert ponds for drinking water, bathing, and some foraging.

Desert Cottontail: Jackrabbits are present but scarce and more common to the west.

White-Tailed Antelope Ground Squirrel: Especially around rock outcrops and two-foot tall shrubs.

White-tailed Prairie Dog: Colonies in the desert on deeper soils and slopes usually less than 10 percent, numbers low compared to 20 years ago.

Rock Squirrel: Especially along Highline Canal.

Plains Pocket Mouse: Most common on high seral ground.

Ord's Kangaroo Rat: Common especially over sandy soils.

Western Harvest Mouse: Prefers low seral sites.

Deer Mouse: Abundant especially on lower seral sites.

Northern Grasshopper Mouse: Around juniper trees.

Desert Woodrat: This smallest packrat takes cover under rocks and large size debris.

Coyote: Ubiquitous.

Red Fox: Especially close to agriculture.

Kit Fox: Rare desert dweller, population a function of prey and coyote abundance.

Raccoon: Regular along Big and East Salt Washes.

Long-Tailed Weasel: Especially in prairie dog towns.

American Badger: Prairie dogs are key, low-to-moderate density compared to Moffat County.

Elk: Near East Salt Wash and the Bookcliffs, where there is critical winter range.

Pronghorn: Sagebrush needed in winter range, population remains well below forage capacity.

Birds

Turkey Vulture: Common spring through fall, non-breeder.

Bald Eagle: Regularly hunts the desert in winter.

Northern Harrier: Common in winter especially close to water, pasture and idle cropland.

Red-Tailed Hawk: Common along the north and south edges.

Rough-Legged Hawk: Scarce winter species.

Golden Eagle: Common year-round, nests known on Big Salt Wash and in the Bookcliffs.

American Kestrel: Forages on the desert, nests in the Bookcliffs and in big cottonwoods.

Merlin: Winter species more capable forager in the desert than kestrel.

Peregrine Falcon: Forages in the desert.

Prairie Falcon: The primary falcon of the area, nests on the Bookcliffs.

Chukar: More common close to Bookcliffs, uses cheatgrass, several guzzlers for them in area.

Ring-Necked Pheasant: East Salt Wash has a few of them.

Sandhill Crane: De-listed from state threatened status, roosts in ponds, forages in desert, spring.

Solitary Sandpiper: The migrant shorebird that forages in the ephemeral streams when they flow.

Long-Billed Curlew: Has nested near 19 Road, north of Highline Canal and in an enclosure.

Mourning Dove: Hunters pass shoot for these in the desert washes.

Western Screech-Owl: In the large cottonwoods on farmsteads, ranges into the desert.

Great Horned Owl: The most ubiquitous owl, nests in cottonwoods and in the Bookcliffs.

Long-Eared Owl: Nests and winter roosts in dense old salt cedars and junipers.

Burrowing Owl: Dependent upon active prairie dog colonies.

Common Nighthawk: Summer species, nests most commonly under junipers.

Common Poorwill: Most common when high country individuals move down before migrating.

White-Throated Swift: Summer, nests in Bookcliffs, forages widely.

Black-Chinned Hummingbird: Most common in May and early June, nests in trees and tall shrubs.

Broad-Tailed Hummingbird: Migrant, most common when Indian paintbrushes are in bloom.

Northern Flicker: Cottonwood species.

Gray Flycatcher: Summer resident, juniper species.

Say's Phoebe: Mostly a summer resident, regularly around abandoned corrals.

Ash-Throated Flycatcher: Summer resident, juniper species.

Cassin's Kingbird: Rare summer resident, scattered juniper species.

Western Kingbird: Regular along powerlines and in farmstead cottonwoods.

Horned Lark: Usually the most abundant bird of the area, prefers open country/low vegetation.

Violet-Green Swallow: Summer species, ranges out of nesting habitat to the north to forage.

Northern Rough-Winged Swallow: Summer, nests in dirt bank holes in the washes.

Barn Swallow: Summer, ranges out of nesting habitat near agriculture to forage.

Pinyon Jay: Ranges widely, but nests and spends most time in juniper stands.

Black-Billed Magpie: Nests in salt cedars and scattered junipers.

Common Raven: Nests in Bookcliffs, on bridge ledges, on transmission and gas field towers.

Juniper Titmouse: Juniper species.

Bushtit: Nests in junipers but ranges widely in winter.

Rock Wren: Breeding species that rarely spends winter here, most common bird in rocky terrain.

Bewick's Wren: One of the loudest and most common juniper birds, several winter in salt cedar.

Blue-Gray Gnatcatcher: Spring to fall, common in the pinyon-juniper/sagebrush edges of the area.

Mountain Bluebird: Frequent in non-breeding seasons in junipers and greasewood/ annual flats.

Northern Mockingbird: Summer, nests in tall greasewood stands.

Sage Thrasher: More common in spring and fall but nests in sagebrush and sagebrush/greasewood.

Northern Shrike: Winter, not common but in winter more numerous than loggerhead shrike.

Loggerhead Shrike: Nests in tall greasewood stands, most migrate south for winter.

Gray Vireo: PIF priority concern species may occur in summer in junipers near Bookcliffs.

Orange-Crowned Warbler: One of the more common migrant warblers in the washes in fall.

Yellow-Rumped Warbler: The most common migrant warbler.

Black-Throated Gray Warbler: A common migrant warbler in spring, nests in pinyon-juniper woodlands.

Wilson's Warbler: One of the more common migrants in the salt cedars.

Yellow-Breasted Chat: Nests in East Salt Wash into Bookcliffs, needs dense riparian shrub.

Western Tanager: Common migrant especially in the washes.

Spotted Towhee: Occurs in the washes, more common north of the Bookcliff line.

American Tree Sparrow: Winters in the washes in small flocks.

Chipping Sparrow: One of the most abundant migrants.

Brewer's Sparrow: Common migrant, a few may nest in sagebrush-greasewood stands.

Vesper Sparrow: Common migrant.

Lark Sparrow: Summer, most common bird at the desert-juniper ecotone.

Black-Throated Sparrow: Summer, small range in Colorado, spiny hopsage good habitat.

Sage Sparrow: Absent most of winter, nests in large sagebrush stands west of 16 Road.

Lark Bunting: State bird, irruptive, common or rare, nested one summer in last 25 years.

Song Sparrow: Winters in the washes.

White-Crowned Sparrow: Common winter species in the washes.

Dark-Eyed Junco: Most common winter species in the washes and junipers.

Lapland Longspur: Rare, irruptive, winter, found in horned lark flocks.

Western Meadowlark: Common except in winter in the washes and adjacent uplands.

Brown-Headed Cowbird: Summer, parasitizes other bird nests, not known to be serious here.

Bullock's Oriole: Summer, nests in trees larger than salt cedars.

Scott's Oriole: PIF priority species, first known nest in Colorado near north end of 18 Road.

House Finch: Frequent in non-breeding seasons in junipers and greasewood/annual flats.

Reptiles

Short-Horned Lizard: Lives where ants, its primary food, are numerous.

Collared Lizard: Prefers large rocks in its terrain, large down wood make good substitutes.

Longnose Leopard Lizard: Requires the tallest shrubs of the desert such as greasewood.

Northern Side-Blotched Lizard: Rocky areas.

Western Whiptail: In the tall shrub and juniper uplands.

Plateau Striped Whiptail: In the washes.

Western Yellowbelly Racer: In tall desert shrub and junipers.

Night Snake: Rocky habitat.

Milk Snake: BLM sensitive species, where there is ample live or dead vegetation ground cover.

Striped Whipsnake: Near mouths of canyons in Bookcliffs.

Gopher Snake (bullsnake): The most frequently met snake.

Western Rattlesnake (midget-faded): BLM sensitive species: uncommon.

Amphibians

Tiger Salamander: In wet weather may show up anywhere.

Woodhouse Toad: In East and Big Salt Washes.

Great Basin Spadefoot Toad: Along ephemeral streams such as Little and Big Salt Washes.

Bullfrog: Ponds close to Highline Canal.

Invertebrates

Western Harvester Ant: Builds the cone mounds, only golden eagle lives as long as the queen ant.

Rugose Harvester Ant: More common close to the Bookcliffs, mounds not symmetrical cones.

Honey Pot Ant: Large big-eyed nocturnal yellow ant.

Cedar Gnat (Midge): Gnat season is May 15 to July 15

Differential Grasshopper: Can reach pest numbers.

Checkered White (Butterfly): Flies early in spring, larval food blue mustard, an exotic annual.

Black Widow Spider: Occupies abandoned burrows of mammals.

Tadpole Shrimp: Lives in ephemeral ponds.

ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT RECORD

NUMBER: CO-GJFO-02-08-EA

CASEFILE/PROJECT NUMBER: N/A

PROJECT NAME: NORTH FRUITA DESERT MANAGEMENT PLAN

ECOREGION/PLANNING UNIT: Grand Valley Intensive Recreation Management Area

LEGAL DESCRIPTION: Bounded by East Salt Creek on the west, Coal Gulch on the north, 21 Road on the east, and the BLM/private land boundary on the south. The area is located in Mesa County, Colorado.

APPLICANT: Bureau of Land Management (BLM)

BACKGROUND:

The North Fruita Desert Area (Grand Valley) was identified as an Intensive Recreation Management Area (IRMA) in the Grand Junction Field Office, Resource Management Plan (RMP) in 1987. The RMP recommended additional planning in the area because of issues such as public use supervision and resource protection. The area's close proximity to Grand Junction and Fruita has also made it increasingly valuable for dispersed recreational opportunities. The area is commonly used by residents of Mesa County but is experiencing increased use from throughout both the region and out-of-state residents, as the mountain bike and off-highway vehicle (OHV) opportunities become more widely known.

Recreational opportunities present in the area include OHV use, mountain biking, horseback riding, camping, hiking, hunting, shooting, driving for pleasure, and viewing scenery and natural features. Existing levels of undirected recreational use have resulted in impacts such as expanding primitive camping areas, parking in new and inappropriate locations, driving cross-country, littering, conflicts between recreational groups and with other land uses, and visitor safety issues. Existing land uses in the area include natural gas development and extraction, grazing, water control management by the Bureau of Reclamation (BOR), wildlife use, and development of enclosed private land parcels.

Representatives from various user groups and concerned parties with an interest in and knowledge about the area formed as a sanctioned subcommittee of the Resource Advisory Council (RAC), the North Fruita Desert (NFD) Citizen Ad-Hoc Committee in August 2000 in order to determine the appropriate management direction for the North Fruita Desert planning area. This group consisted of representatives from the Colorado Plateau Mountain Bike Trail Association, Mesa County Cycling Association, Grand Valley Mountain Bike Patrol, Grand Mesa Jeep Club, Motorcycle Trail Riding Association, Bookcliff Rattlers Motorcycle Club, Western Slope ATV Association,

Colorado Environmental Coalition, Sierra Club, City of Fruita, Colorado, Colorado State Parks, landowners, grazing permittees, other users such as horseback riders and shooters, and representatives from the BLM's Northwest RAC. Numerous meetings were held between August 2000 and December 2003. The BLM coordinated with the North Fruita Desert Citizens Ad-Hoc Committee during this time to write a management plan for the area. The management plan contains a vision for the area, goals and objectives, and management recommendations and actions for the area. The recommended management actions in this plan were formulated to direct public use to appropriate areas, define emphasized use areas for specific recreational uses, decrease user conflicts, and decrease the impact of recreation users on the landscape. The North Fruita Desert Management Plan contains the management goals, objectives and management direction, and actions agreed upon by the BLM and the NFD Citizens Ad-Hoc Committee.

In November of 2003, a draft plan was published for a 60 day comment period. About 800 comments were received. A summary of the responses to recurring themes in these comments is an appendix to this document.

NEED FOR PROPOSED ACTION:

One of the outcomes of the 1987 RMP was a recommendation for additional planning for the North Fruita Desert. This management plan fulfills the obligation of the GJFO to complete a site-specific plan for this area. It establishes management objectives and identifies management strategies to achieve those objectives. The North Fruita Desert Management Plan is consistent with the RMP, with the exception of the minerals NSO and the OHV designation. This document also serves as an amendment to the 1987 RMP for these two resources. This document is consistent with BLM management policies, and is an integrated issue-driven plan that addresses all major resource disciplines present in the area and the issues associated with them.

The western slope of Colorado has experienced a large increase in growth in recent years. As the population has increased, the demand placed on nearby public lands has increased as well. The area included in this plan is in close proximity to the cities of Fruita and Grand Junction and is easily accessed by all types of recreation users.

During the past few years the BLM has been made aware of problems with conflicting uses within this area and an increase in damage to the natural resources because of increased use. The BLM's 1987 resource management plan allows for motorized use on "existing" roads and trails. Since 1987, the area has experienced a dramatic increase in motorized and non-motorized use, particularly from mountain bikes that were not recognized in the 1987 RMP. A system of user-built trails (developed without BLM authorization), promotion of the area's bicycling resources, and development of a regional-level mountain bike festival have cemented the area's reputation as a premier mountain bike destination. The management actions outlined in the North Fruita Desert Management Plan are intended to allow traditional uses to continue such as grazing, and oil and gas development, as well as to prevent additional resource degradation and minimize user conflicts while allowing for both present and future recreational uses.

PLAN CONFORMANCE REVIEW:

Name of Plan: Grand Junction Resource Management Plan (RMP)

Date Approved: January 29, 1987

Page or Decision Number: Area F, pages 2-46

Summarized below is the management direction for each resource as noted in the 1987 RMP (Recreation through Transportation). How management for those resources would be changed is discussed in the section entitled "RMP Amendment." The proposed actions have been reviewed for conformance with this plan (43 CFR 1610.5, BLM 1617.3). The RMP placed the North Fruita Desert Area in an "Emphasis on Water" category.

Recreation

Manage the Grand Valley (which includes the Grand Valley desert and Rabbit Valley) as an intensive use recreation management area. Identify the three OHV open areas (one of which is within the North Fruita Desert Plan Area) for intensive public and competitive OHV use. Identify these same areas as a no shooting zone. Use signs and public information materials to reduce user conflicts and unauthorized activities. Focus management on providing "rural" Recreation Opportunity Spectrum (ROS) opportunities in the OHV open area and "roaded natural" ROS opportunities in the remainder of the desert area. Address the need for active supervision of recreational uses in the management plan for the Grand Valley Intensive Recreation Management Area (which the North Fruita Desert Plan partially addresses).

Off Road Vehicles

Designate areas as open to cross-country vehicle use and competitive events: includes a 400-acre area on the east side of 18 Road immediately north of where 18 Road crosses the Highline Canal. Consider competitive events proposed outside the established open area on an individual basis. The intent of permit processing would be to keep most of an event on existing roads and trails (most washes are existing trails) and allow up to 25 percent of the total race mileage cross country (off existing roads and trails). The rugged, relatively barren zones of exposed Mancos Shale that are scattered throughout the Grand Valley desert are the areas where cross-country use might be authorized. Monitor competitive events to ensure compliance with permit requirements and to prevent excessive cross-country use from damaging soil structure in any one area. Do not allow competitive use to occur repeatedly in any one area outside of established open areas. Limit vehicle use in the remainder of the area to existing roads primarily to protect watershed values.

Water

Take measures to reduce sediment yield from approximately 117,000 acres and salinity yield from approximately 133,000 acres in the Grand Valley desert. Treat severely eroding stream channels in Big Salt Wash (8.3 miles) and East Salt Creek (15.4 miles).

Locatable Minerals

The entire area is open to mineral location except for those areas closed because of existing withdrawals.

Coal

That portion of the planning area within the Bookcliffs (Coal Gulch area) contains mineable coal and is available for leasing and construction of surface facilities.

Oil and Gas

Make available for leasing approximately 56,263 acres with standard lease terms, 25,400 acres with no surface occupancy, and 108,620 acres with other stipulations to protect scenic and natural values (including the face of the Bookcliffs, steep slopes, deer and elk winter range and threatened and endangered species).

Wildlife

Prohibit wood sales in nonproductive woodlands in the Grand Valley between the Bookcliffs and the Colorado River. Prohibit disturbing activities in deer and elk critical winter ranges and migration corridors from December 1 to May 1. Retain 30 percent of sagebrush manipulation areas in leave strips or untreated patches. Prohibit surface disturbance within 100 feet of perennial streams, except at necessary creek crossings.

Threatened and Endangered Species

Protect known important habitat sites of sensitive animal and plant species and communities from surface disturbing activities.

Livestock Grazing

Initiate intensive grazing systems on all allotments in the Grand Valley desert. This would entail additional range projects and some changes in grazing use to ensure ground cover, to minimize soil loss, and to manage for sod forming species where appropriate. Give special attention to the ecological integrity of riparian areas in the implementation of livestock grazing management plans.

Public Utilities

Identify threatened and endangered species habitat, scenic values, steep slopes, deer and elk winter range, and known locations of sensitive species as sensitive to the location of public utilities. Identify the remainder of the area as suitable.

Transportation

Close roads that no longer serve their primary purpose and that have relatively little value to multiple-use management to protect wildlife. The highest priority for closure would be roads in critical areas having a good chance for success in closure.

Fire

Management in this area to protect adjacent private property through the prevention of fire spread from public land, protect oil and gas facilities, pumping stations, other improvements, coal outcrops, perennial forage resources, riparian areas and reduce air quality impacts. The proposed fire plan of 2004 will revise the prescription to a B polygon. The change will permit the use of prescribed fire as a pre suppression tool throughout the planning area.

Law Enforcement

Subsequent to the RMP a law enforcement plan was written and has been updated in 2004. The actions described in this plan are consistent with and in support of the GJFO Law Enforcement Plan. Many of the actions are in response to conditions that result in law enforcement action. Fencing and visitor information efforts are important actions to reduce the need for law enforcement.

DESCRIPTION OF ALTERNATIVES:

- A. No Action
- B. Friends of the North Fruita Desert
- C. Environmental Focus
- D. Multiple Use
 - Two transportation management prescriptions

A. NO ACTION ALTERNATIVE:

This alternative involves the continuation of existing management direction and policies pertaining to travel management and recreational use of the North Fruita Desert planning area. Specifically, motorized use would continue to be allowed on all existing roads and trails. Popular routes would be identified using maps and signs. Some additional conveniences (sanitation, signing, trailheads) could be developed. No camping facilities

would be included nor would any additional restrictions be placed on recreational visitors. Alterations or additions to the trail system could be made within the BLM process.

B. FRIENDS OF THE NORTH FRUITA DESERT ALTERNATIVE

The priority of this alternative is on the preservation of single-track trail and on maximizing private land access opportunities. The alternative includes a designated bicycle use emphasis area and construction of new single-track trails to separate motorcycle and bicycle use on parallel trail systems.

1. Designate a mountain bicycle emphasis area at the base of the Bookcliffs that would emphasize mechanized, non-motorized recreation. Existing trails utilized by both bicyclists and motorcyclists would continue to see that use until parallel trails or reroutes could be constructed to separate those activities. User-requested additional trails would be considered by the BLM subject to the Agency's environmental analysis process.
2. Trails accessing and crossing private property in the western half of the study area would remain open pending a study focused on ways to continue that access, e.g., re-routing trails outside of private land, land acquisition, and easements.
3. A new single-track trail would be constructed to link 18 and 21 Roads. Use would be shared between the motorcycle and bicycle communities.
4. In order to decrease potential human/cattle conflict, all dogs would be under their owner's voice control while on trails. From January 1 to May 15 unattended dogs would be leashed while at campground or trailheads to protect calving livestock.

C. ENVIRONMENTAL FOCUS ALTERNATIVE

The priorities for the Environmental Focus alternative include protection of riparian areas, closure and control of OHV open areas, designation of three designated shooting areas, closure of duplicate trails to lessen trail density for protection of wildlife habitat, and designation of a non-motorized, non-mechanized hiker/equestrian emphasis area. Specific actions under this alternative are detailed below:

1. All trails within 100 feet of the riparian zone on either side of East Salt Creek and Big Salt Wash would be closed.
2. Recreational trails would be designated as open or closed. Duplicate, parallel, loop, and stem trails would be closed in order to decrease road and trail density. Burrowing owl and associated prairie dog habitat are special concerns, which determine the need for this action.

3. Designate and manage three shooting areas for all firearms use in the North Fruita Desert. Locations would be as follows: a) Gravel pit north of Highline State Park, and b) Two target areas adjacent to 21 Road. Three other areas identified by the shooting community would not be designated shooting areas because of conflicts with existing trail locations and/or adjacency with privately owned land.
4. Designate a hiker/equestrian emphasis area on the east edge of the study area. The eastern most trail of the two routes entering the emphasis area would be designated for all uses including mechanized and non-motorized. The western most trail has nearly disappeared from non-use and would be designated closed. User-requested hiker/equestrian trails would be considered in the future subject to BLM's environmental analysis process.
5. All OHV open areas would be closed.
6. In order to decrease potential human/cattle conflict, all dogs would be under their owner's voice control while on trails. From January 1 to May 15 unattended dogs would be leashed while at campground or trailheads to protect calving livestock.

D. MULTIPLE-USE ALTERNATIVE:

The Multiple-Use Alternative would allow for approximately 35 miles of trails within a mountain bike emphasis area, would create a hiking emphasis area, would provide 14-17 ½ miles of new multiple-use routes (mileage depends on which sub-alternative is selected) that would make trail connections and add to the flexibility of the route design, and would provide two miles of new bicycle trails, in addition to the existing trails, within the bicycle emphasis area. The proposed actions making up the Multiple-Use Alternative are detailed below:

Transportation Management Prescriptions

- A. Two different general travel management prescriptions are being considered for the planning area. The "Encourage, Prohibit, Allow" (EPA) prescription and the designated routes prescription, are described below:

EPA

1. The North Fruita Desert Area would be managed using an EPA approach. Encouraged routes are existing trails that form loops and connections and offer attractive recreational trail opportunities. These would be marked on the ground and on handout maps to allow for easy visitor orientation. Allowed routes are secondary trails that would be marked on handout maps with less line weight and not marked on the ground. These routes are identified solely to facilitate navigation. It is anticipated that many of these routes would see less use and some would eventually disappear through time. Prohibited routes would be closed. Typically these routes

enter private lands and public access would be discouraged through signing. Encouraged and Allowed routes outside the bicycle emphasis area would be open to all types of vehicles, although single-track trails would be limited to vehicles less than 32 inches wide.

Designated Routes

2. The designated routes model would be used to manage all motorized and mechanized travel. If increases in impacts indicate through monitoring, designated routes may also be applied to equestrian and foot traffic as well. In this prescription all routes would be designated as available to, or restricted to, each means of travel. Colorado standard travel management signs would be used. Administrative access would be provided to commercial sites (gas wells, range improvements). Designated loop trails would be prominently signed. Trails in the bicycle emphasis area would be restricted to non-motorized use only, except for administrative and emergency needs. Outside the bicycle emphasis area all trails would be open to all uses with the exception of single-track trails (less than 1 meter wide). Single tracks would be open to hikers, bicyclists, equestrians and motorcyclists only. Trails not part of the recreation trail system and having no commercial value would be closed. All closed routes would be signed closed and systematically rehabilitated as resources allow. (See map 1)
- B. The following actions are common to all multiple use alternatives.
1. Roads and trails entering private land would be signed “End of Public Route, Entering Private Land.” Trail-end signs would be located on public land, far enough from public/private land boundaries to allow vehicles to turn around on public land.
 2. New shared-use, single-track trail would be constructed in the following locations:
 - One half mile of trail connecting Coal Gulch Road with 16 Road, to the north of private property.
 - Two miles of trail following a wash that intersects V.70 Road and is parallel to the western edge of Coal Gulch Road.
 - Four miles of trail on the ridgeline immediately to the south of Coal Gulch Road.
 - Three and one half miles of trail following Coyote Wash and trail segments further to the east with the intent of connecting Highline Park to the North Fruita Desert trails and to relocate most OHV traffic away from the Bureau of Reclamation water control structures and the Highline Canal.
 - Two miles of trail parallel to 18 Road, located 1/8 mile east of the private inholdings, which diverts traffic away from private lands and Big Salt Wash.

3. New bicycle, single-track trail would be constructed in the following locations:
 - One mile of trail connecting between the eastern extension of Vegetarian Trail and the Edge Loop Trail at the base of the Bookcliffs.
 - One mile of trail to the east of Prime Cut Trail that would accommodate beginner-to-intermediate bicycle riders on a north/south route.
4. The OHV open area just north of the canal on 18 Road would be developed to, a) control the spread of the area, b) allow for trailhead facilities for the motorized visitors, and c) allow for proper use and Tread Lightly information to best inform users of expected behavior. Actions include the following:
 - Fencing the outer boundary of the open area.
 - Fencing approximately two and one half miles north along the east side of 18 Road.
 - Fencing approximately one mile along the north side of Q.50 Road.
 - Installation of a vault toilet.
 - Installation of a trailhead facility near the intersection of 18 Road and Q.50 Road with a kiosk to orient visitors, instill proper use ethics, and inform visitors.
 - All fencing would be designed to allow for the passage of antelope. Fencing would be three-wire with a smooth bottom wire. Wire spacing would be 18 inches, 30 inches, and 42 inches as measured from the ground.
 - Seasonal trail closures will be used as a tool to protect wildlife values.
 - No new trails will be considered in the pinion juniper stands at the base of the Bookcliffs west of 16 Rd. and east of Lippan Wash.
5. Sections of the southern half of Zippity Doo Dah bicycle trail, which represents a soil erosion hazard, would be rerouted and/or reconstructed. Until this work is completed, the trail would remain open to bicycle use.
6. The existing rope-assisted bicycle route down the pour-over in Lippan Wash is considered a liability and safety hazard. The rope would be removed and an existing stock trail bypassing the hazardous point would be upgraded and extended to allow for safe passage.
7. Additional trails throughout the planning area would be considered by BLM subject to the Agency's environmental analysis process after the implementation of the actions called for in this plan have been

accomplished. All users; whether motorized, mechanized, horseback, or afoot; would be encouraged to present trail proposals to the BLM for evaluation as future designated routes. After the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) process is complete, user groups would be given the opportunity to construct and maintain new authorized trails.

8. All new, unauthorized routes would be closed with signs and physical blocking, and then rehabilitated.
9. Existing routes, which are part of a designated trail system, that do not meet BLM standards would remain open until suitable relocated/alternative routes are available. Routes would be evaluated and restoration/repair work done on a five-year rotating basis. This document analyzes the impacts of the proposed new construction trails and only site specific cultural clearances will be required prior to construction of proposed new trails. For trails depicted as new construction see map 1.
10. Bicycle and motorcycle use on existing trails within the bicycle emphasis area would be separated as much as possible with one exception. Motorcycle and bicycle traffic heading east on Coal Gulch Road would follow existing oil and gas service roads (T. 8 S., R. 100 W., Secs. 30, 31, T. 9 S., R. 100 W., Sec. 6, and T. 9 S., R. 101 W., Sec.1). The present trail from Ross Ridge into Lippan Wash will be abandoned and reclaimed. This trail will be replaced with a newly constructed single track trail meeting BLM guidelines. The Lippan Wash trail will be re-worked so that the motorcycles will use the bottom of the wash to the degree possible and a new trail winding in and out of the wash will be constructed for the bicyclists. At the eastern edge of the bicycle emphasis area, the trails would split with the bicyclists routed west on Edge Loop. One and one-half miles of new single track will be constructed for the motorcyclists to route them to the east-west trail in T. 9 S., R. 101 W., Secs. 3, 4, 5, 6, 8, 9.
11. A primitive campground, based on present use patterns at the end of 18 Road, would be constructed. This campground would be designed to accommodate 35 to 40 individual sites, clustered around vault-type toilets equipped with wooden screens encircling the toilet thrones. Sites would be hardened for use and the main campground loop road, as well as the individual site access spurs, would be delineated with barriers to prevent area spread. Construction of the campground would necessitate the removal of 20 to 25 small juniper trees. Camping will be permitted only in the campground within the bicycle emphasis area. Dispersed camping is allowed outside the bicycle emphasis area. No surface occupancy for mineral extraction would be instituted to protect 200 acres and the recreational resources present in the area of the campground.

The following special stipulation would be applied to any coal lease, off-lease right-of-way, or other authorization that proposes coal surface

facilities that might impact the campground and trailhead near the end of 18 Road.

If the BLM determines that the campground and trailhead would be impacted by the proposed coal mine surface facilities such that the campground and trailhead should be relocated, the coal lessee shall fund the cost of an environmental analysis to determine the best site for relocation and also the cost for relocating the campground and trailhead. If the coal mine surface facilities are proposed within the campground and/or trailhead area designated as No Surface Occupancy (NSO), the NSO requirement may be waived or reduced in scope if the coal company pays for the relocation of the campground and trailhead, as noted above, or if the lessee can demonstrate that operations can be conducted without causing unacceptable impacts on the concern(s) identified (also see trailhead NSO, item L).

12. No open, solid fuels campfires would be allowed in the campground area. Gasoline and gas cooking stoves would be acceptable.
13. Overnight camping fees may be charged and all collected fees would be returned to the campground and used for maintenance and services. Partnership agreements to help the BLM in the management and collection of fees for the site would be sought.
14. A hiker/equestrian emphasis area would be established. Hiking and horse use, as well as winter wildlife habitat, would be the priority in this area. Motorized use would be limited to one existing two-track trail entering the area (the other would be closed), except for administrative or emergency use.
15. Commercial activities would continue to be subject to existing stipulations and regulations as amended by the decision record of this document and subsequent Federal Register notices.
16. Competitive and organized events would be considered through the BLM Special Recreation Permit process. Events that would adversely affect the existing trails or existing uses would not be permitted. A provision in the RMP allowing race events to plan 25 percent of total event mileage off the existing trail grid would no longer be allowed. In order to protect trails, stipulations governing competitive event permits would include language allowing for the cancellation or alteration of routes in case of inclement weather. Monitoring both before and after events would be used to assess impacts attributable to the activity. Consistent with SRP policy, a bond may be required to assure compliance with all stipulations of the permit. Post-event rehabilitation and future permit stipulations would be based on monitored impacts. The BLM retains the discretion to limit the number of participants in any given permitted activity.

17. Shooting areas would not be designated through this plan. If a group of responsible users comes forward to partner with the BLM in maintaining shooting sites in the North Fruita area, then BLM would cooperatively manage these sites. The bicycle emphasis area would be closed to shooting, except for the lawful taking of game, due to public safety concerns and use conflicts.
18. Public information and education kiosks would be installed at key locations. These kiosks would inform the public of recreational opportunities in the area, visitor use ethics, and travel and recreation restrictions. Handout maps explaining the trail management system and directing users would be available at all entry points.
19. A lockable gate at the entrance to the county gravel site off Highway 139 would be installed to protect the ongoing rehabilitation of the site.
20. In order to protect the existing 18 Road trailhead, NSO is proposed for 80 acres surrounding the trailhead.

ALTERNATIVES CONSIDERED BUT ELIMINATED

A. Annex Land North of Coal Gulch Road into the Plan

This alternative would add approximately 15,000 acres to the plan boundaries specifically aimed at providing single-track trail opportunities for the motorcycle community. A trailhead for motorized users would be constructed at the entrance to Coal Gulch. The addition of these future opportunities would preclude the need for shared routes for both bicycles and motorcycles on the margins of the bicycle emphasis area, which was a key element of the Multiple-Use Alternative. No actions implementing shared use of these trails would occur. This alternative is rejected for the following reasons:

This alternative would be dependent on future trail construction and until that construction was finished, the motorcycle community would not have access to any routes on the edge of the bicycle emphasis area traveling north/south or east/west.

The Grand Junction RMP provides for the protection of deer and elk critical winter range in this zone from December 1 to May 1. This alternative would not provide for the year round access to rolling terrain that motorcycle users presently enjoy because motorized users would be prohibited from accessing the area north of Coal Gulch Road for five months out of the year. This wildlife closure is reinforced by the generally wetter, colder weather at this altitude, which effectively precludes winter-spring use of the area by, even beyond, the five-month wildlife closure.

Wildlife habitat considerations would preclude the construction of more than one loop route in this area. Motorcyclists would not have a significant opportunity with only one permissible route.

The trailhead location would not provide a practicable and feasible route up the cliffs to access the possible motorcycle routes on the plateau top north of Coal Gulch.

B. Construct an Additional Trail Down Layton Wash

This alternative puts forward a motorized trail down Layton Wash in order to avoid the need to share mechanized, non-motorized and motorized uses in Lippan Wash, which was a key element in the Multiple-Use Alternative. This alternative is rejected for the following reasons:

The route crosses privately owned land that would have to be acquired or an easement negotiated, or the private land would need to be bypassed; a difficult option within the tight confines of the canyon. There is an open mineshaft on the private land that would also have to be mitigated.

A year-round, naturally occurring spring used by wildlife is astride the route, which would be difficult to avoid within the tight canyon constraints. Wildlife would be disturbed by both construction and use of this trail on a continuing basis. Soils are unstable, which adds to the difficulty of construction, maintenance, and use of the trail, and increases the potential cost of creating the trail. Construction of the trail, although possible in an engineering sense, would be prohibitively expensive.

INSERTION TO ENVIRONMENTAL ANALYSIS FORMAT FOR COMPLIANCE WITH SECTION 302 OF THE FEDERAL LAND POLICY AND MANAGEMENT ACT (FLPMA) RELATIVE TO THE COMB WASH GRAZING DECISION

- A. A review of applicable planning documents and a thoughtful consideration of new issues and new demands for the use of the public lands involved in the allotment has been made. This analysis concludes that the current land and resource uses are appropriate.

Standards for Public Land Health:

A summary analysis of the Proposed Action on the Current Situation. Total Acres are determined by the document coordinator. If more than one allotment is being evaluated the document coordinator would identify them at this point. Allotment _____=a, _____=b.

	Acres Achieving or	Acres Not Achieving	Acres Not Applicable to	Total Acres	Initials

	Moving Towards Achieving		Standard	_____	
Standard 1 (Upland soils: proper infiltration/permeability rates)					
Currently					
with Prop.					
Data & Conclusions:					
Standard 2 (Riparian systems functioning properly)					
Currently	X				LBR
with Prop.					
Data & Conclusions: Lower areas on Big Salt Wash were classified as not being riparian. The lower portion of East Salt Creek are functioning at risk in the PFC assessment and was determined to be outside the management control of the BLM due to irrigation withdrawals.					
Standard 3 (Healthy and productive plant/animal communities)					
Currently	85%plant				LBR
with Prop.					
Data & Conclusions: Plants: Most areas in the NFD are meeting land health standards. There are some areas of concern that are not meeting land health standards, these areas are normally located in the heavier Mancos shale valley bottoms, where wildland fire occurred, OHV travel has been heavy, or where historic grazing was concentrated (lambling areas, too many animals, grazing time and frequency during the growing season with out proper grazing management). Acres meeting, not meeting, or moving towards has not been determined and would be determined when a land health assessment has been completed for the area. An educated projection of currently meeting is within the proper box above.					
Standard 4 (Threatened and Endangered Species)					
Currently	X				RL DLS
with Prop.	X				
Data & Conclusions: See attached map showing known rare animals/plants/plant communities locations to be avoided. Overall it appears that the one species in the NFD listed for ESA protection, the bald eagle, should find conditions basically unaltered by the plan. Individuals of this species range throughout the plan area.					
Standard 5 (Water Quality)					
Currently			X		JS
with Prop.			X		
Data & Conclusions: Acres are not an appropriate measure of compliance with water quality standards. Refer to the water quality section below for an assessment of impacts.					
Summary					
Currently					
with Prop.					
Conclusions:					

AFFECTED ENVIRONMENT / ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACTS / MITIGATION MEASURES:

SETTING: A description of the setting and affected environment can be found on pages 4-10 in the proposed North Fruita Desert Management Plan.

CRITICAL ELEMENTS: The following critical elements of the human environment have been analyzed under the Proposed Action and No-action alternatives. Other non-critical elements will be discussed in this document due to the nature and scope of the Proposed Action.

AIR QUALITY: There would be no major impacts to the Air Quality of the Grand Valley with this project.

Signature of specialist: /s/ David P. Stevens – 6/25/2002

CULTURAL RESOURCES: A records search of the planning unit was conducted by the GJFO archaeologist using in-house site data and the SHPO database. Twenty-six sites and 42 isolated finds have been recorded by various inventories. A field check of six sites recorded in the 1980s that had been classified as eligible for nomination to the National Register of Historic Places (NRHP) or “need data” was also conducted. It was determined that none of these sites is eligible under current standards. Re-evaluation forms were sent to the SHPO for concurrence. The extremely low density of prehistoric sites in the area is attributable to the arid nature of the local environment and a concomitant paucity of natural resources. Any new construction of roads, trails, or facilities would be preceded by a Class III inventory of the APE as required by Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act (NHPA). The current project is in compliance with the NHPA, the Colorado State Protocol Agreement, and other federal law, regulation, policy, and guidelines regarding cultural resources.

Signature of specialist: /s/ Mike Berry – 6/30/2003

ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE: There are no disproportionately high and/or adverse human health or environmental effects proposed with this project on minority populations and low-income populations.

Signature of specialist: /s/ David P. Stevens – 6/25/2002

FLOODPLAINS, WETLANDS, RIPARIAN ZONES, AND ALLUVIAL VALLEYS: The lower portions of Big Salt Creek were not classified as riparian in 1993. The lower portion of East Salt Creek was classified as riparian and functioning at risk. Reasons for function at risk were determined to be outside the BLM’s control and were partly due to irrigation withdraws on the private land upstream. No adverse affect on riparian resources is anticipated from implementation of any of the alternatives.

Signature of specialist: /s/ Lynae Rogers – 7/21/2003

INVASIVE, NONNATIVE SPECIES (Weeds): The NFD area was intensively inventoried for noxious weeds in 2002, and 2003. A few patches of Russian knapweed are found in the desert country, and control of them is not seen as a problem. The most significant issue is diffuse knapweed, which occurs on Ross Ridge and is scattered along the two-track/bike trail that exits Ross Ridge into Lipan Wash. In 2002 the BLM weed crew made significant strides in eliminating this weed from the greater Garfield-Mesa Area. The BLM is confident that it is on the downhill side of this infestation, although follow-up would be necessary for several years until the seed bank is gone.

All Action Alternatives: History shows that disturbances, whether they are roads, trails, ponds, etc., are the places that weeds get a toehold. Purely from a weed perspective, any action that results in the least disturbance is likely to minimize the threat of invasion. The good news about NFD is that the area is pretty harsh even for weeds to grow. Given the fact that there is not a big weed problem to start with, any of the alternatives work (except No Action, see below). The proposed action is acceptable for weed management by the fact that the area would see intensive management. This would make weed management easier than haphazard use of an area. If the designated trail approach detailed in the Multiple-Use Alternative works well, the BLM can concentrate on areas of high use when looking for weeds, and we should see a decrease in routes that are avenues for weeds to start. If facilities are constructed, the equipment must be washed before it arrives on public land and contractors need to have that stipulation in the contract.

No Action: To continue custodial management of the area would likely lead to tougher weed issues as the sprawl of disturbance continues.

Signature of specialist: /s/ Sparky Taber - 2/25/2003

MIGRATORY BIRD TREATY ACT ISSUES: The Environmental Focus Alternative would be the better alternative for reducing the possibility of “take” of native birds. This would be due to the measure of closing “OHV open areas.” Vehicles that stay on trails have virtually no chance of destroying nests or individual birds. The other three alternatives allow OHV open areas and these carry some chance of destroying nests (mainly of horned larks). This risk is not enough to register as a violation of this act, especially under the multiple use which attempts to limit the expansion of OHV activity.

Signature of specialist: /s/ Ron Lambeth – 7/30/2003

NATIVE AMERICAN RELIGIOUS CONCERNS: No NRHP-eligible properties occur within the proposed project area. In addition, there is no other known evidence that suggests that the project area holds special significance for Native Americans, and accordingly, no Native American Indian consultation was conducted for the proposed planning unit. If significant cultural resources are encountered during the conduct of NHPA Section 106 inventories, the BLM would initiate appropriate consultation measures at that time.

Signature of specialist: /s/ Mike Berry – 6/30/2003

PRIME AND UNIQUE FARMLANDS: There are no Prime and Unique Farmlands affected by this proposal.

Signature of specialist: /s/ David P. Stevens 6-25-2002

THREATENED AND ENDANGERED SPECIES: The area has a history of special status species in limited areas. These areas are to be avoided by all trails and recreation facilities. Detailed information of the specific sites is found in the Arc View system used by BLM. None of the alternatives would affect the one species listed for protection under the Endangered Species Act, the bald eagle. The level of human activity in the area may have already eliminated nesting by the BLM sensitive species, Ferruginous Hawk, from the area. Existing routes pass within a quarter-mile of all three of the historic nest sites. The bike trail passing two of the nest sites would be rerouted (T. 8 S., R. 101 and 102 W., Section lines of 31 and 36) under the “Preferred Alternative”, but the reroute would likely be insufficient to allow the hawks to return. The decline of prairie dogs has likely also had an effect, diminishing the imperative for them to nest here. Avoiding prairie dog towns are features of the “Preferred Alternative” (Multiple-Use) and the Environmental Focus Alternative. Additionally this decline in prairie dogs has impacted the numbers of the Burrowing Owl, a threatened species under state law. Thus the capacity for any alternative to impact these species is reduced and may be eliminated. If the prairie dog numbers rebound, the importance of the measures to decrease human disturbance on these two raptors would increase in importance. The BLM sensitive species, longnose leopard lizard will benefit as the spread of cheatgrass is checked. All alternatives will attempt this, yet the multiple-use/designated routes prescription and the Environmental Focus Alternatives would facilitate it the best. The Great Basin spadefoot frog will be protected by keeping trails out of washes. The No Action Alternative would do the least to keep vehicles out of the washes. Protection of the washes increase in this order, under the Friends of the NFD, the Multiple-Use/EPA prescription, multiple-use/designated routes prescription, and the Environmental Focus Alternatives. The Environmental Focus Alternative contains the strongest measures for protecting special status species. The designated routes prescription of the Multiple Use option, “The Preferred Alternative,” is superior to the EPA prescription of the Multiple Use option and the Friends of the NFD Alternative in providing assurances for protecting special status species. Note there are no sage grouse issues in the North Fruita Desert.

Signature of specialist: /s/ Ron Lambeth – 7/19/2004
/s/ David Smith - 8/19/2000

WASTES, HAZARDOUS OR SOLID: Hazardous and solid wastes are an issue in the planning area as a result of the high level of public use and the resulting frequency of illegal dumping. The area receives most of the illegal dumping in the field office area, due to the high use and proximity to Grand Junction and Fruita. This recreation management plan would not likely influence the frequency of dumping of trash and hazardous waste. It may not impact the incidence of litter since the area would undoubtedly continue to receive increasing public use. Illegal dumping is addressed as it is reported and encountered in the field, and increasing recreational use of the area may aid in reporting incidences of dumping of hazardous wastes.

The Multiple-Use Alternative would not designate additional special shooting areas. This would serve to disperse the target shooting and not concentrate lead contamination from spent bullets. The Environmental Focus Alternative would designate and manage three

shooting areas. If this alternative is selected, the designated shooting areas should be chosen, designed, and managed in such a manner as to minimize and remediate potential lead contamination.

Signature of specialist: Alan Kraus – 2/10/2003

WATER QUALITY, SURFACE AND/OR GROUND: The North Fruita Desert Management Planning Area encompasses portions of the Salt Creek, Big Salt Wash, and Little Salt Wash watersheds. Tributaries to Salt Creek, in the assessment area, include Mack Wash and Coyote Wash. Big Salt Wash tributaries include Coal Canyon, Dry Gulch, Lippan Wash, Layton Wash, and East Branch. Tributaries to Little Salt Creek are unnamed. The reaches of these tributaries within the planning area are ephemeral, so flow is in response to convective summer storms and snowmelt. Limited water quality data is available for these systems because they are generally dry. Data collected by the BLM in Big Salt Wash on the north end of the planning area indicate elevated total dissolved solids (TDS), with the major ions including sodium, magnesium, and sulfates. The mean TDS was nearly 1100 milligrams per liter (mg/l). As the streams flow to the south across the Mancos shale the TDS levels increase, as evidenced by the mean TDS on East Salt Creek above the canal at nearly 3400 mg/l. No suspended sediment data have been collected but visual observations indicate extremely high levels are common during runoff events. Levels over 300,000 mg/l have been measured on West Salt Creek. Similar concentrations probably occur in the washes/creeks within this area. Channel cross-sections on Big Salt indicate significant channel erosion occurs during some runoff events.

The Colorado River Basin Salinity Control Act (Public Law 93-320) was enacted in June 1974. Title I of the act addresses the United States' commitment to the Water Treaty of 1944 with Mexico. The Colorado River Basin Salinity Control Act was amended in 1984 by public law 98-569. Public Law 98-569 included direction to the BLM to develop a comprehensive program for minimizing salt contributions from lands under their management. Studies conducted on Mancos shale in the Upper Colorado River Basin have demonstrated a positive relationship between sediment yield and salt production (Schumm, et al., 1986). Sediment yield increases as a result of either upland erosion or streambank and gully erosion. Upland erosion is attributed to rill and inter-rill flow. Salt and sediment yield are dependent upon storm period, landform type, and the soluble mineral content of the geologic formation. Badlands are the most erosionally unstable, with sediment yields as high as 15 tons per acre (U.S. Department of Agriculture, 1976). Rilling accounts for approximately 80 percent of the sediment yield (U.S. Department of the Interior). Because salt production is closely related to sediment yield and the badland soils have not been leached of their soluble minerals, they produced the greatest amount of salt of the landform types. The SCS in 1977 estimated the Grand Valley annually contributed 2.9 million tons of sediment, and 600,000 to 700,000 tons of salt of which 80,000 tons results from erosion.

The most important variables influenced by management actions are vegetative cover and compaction. The BLM's preferred method of achieving salinity control are actions that increase ground cover, stabilizing stream banks, controlling accelerated gully erosion,

and minimizing surface disturbing activities. Keeping with the spirit of the law, the RMP set sediment and salinity reduction objectives for Area F: Emphasis on Water, the area encompassed by this plan. They include, in part, taking measures to reduce sediment yield from approximately 177,000 acres and salinity yield from approximately 133,000 acres in the Grand Valley. Additionally, treating 8.3 miles of severely eroding stream channel in Big Salt Wash was identified. The development of a network of roads, both single and double track, needs to consider the objectives of the RMP and compliance with the Colorado River Basin Salinity Control Act.

Siting of routes is probably the single most significant factor in reducing sediment and salinity production. Every effort should be taken to maximize vegetative cover and minimize compaction within a watershed. If the vegetative cover is removed and soils compacted, rills often form accelerating erosion and sediment production. While open areas have significantly increased saline sediment production in that localized area, they can be beneficial if they remove impact from a large percentage of a watershed. Sediment and salinity production from these open areas can often be mitigated by construction of sediment detention structures down gradient of the open area. Water structures constructed for livestock and wildlife watering within the planning area would experience a shortened functional life. They would need to have sediment removed more frequently due to the accelerated sediment produced from upstream trail use. Alternatives favoring fewer routes, those constructed more on the contour, concentrating open OHV use in a small percentage of a watershed, those constructed with areas with more rock content are preferred over those without these characteristics. Consideration should be given to construction of sediment and salinity mitigation structures and monitoring for excessive resource damage.

Signature of specialist: /s/ Jim Scheidt - 2/6/2003

WILDERNESS, AREAS OF CRITICAL ENVIRONMENTAL CONCERN, WILD AND SCENIC RIVERS: The planning area is not within the boundaries of a designated wilderness area or a wilderness study area (WSA), Area of Critical Environmental Concern, or Wild and Scenic River.

Signature of specialist: B Laub 7/21/04

NON-CRITICAL ELEMENTS

ACCESS AND TRANSPORTATION: Initiating travel management in the planning area, along with the public information efforts, would implement the RMP as amended. User maps and on-the-ground signing would greatly reduce off-trail travel and associated resource impacts. Phasing out unnecessary routes through time will give the public time to change use patterns and will decrease natural resource impacts stemming from those trails. The proposed new trails will redirect visitors away from the Highline Canal, private property, and riparian zones. The resulting designated loop trail system would provide a high quality trail experience for motorized and non-motorized visitors.

Private property would be better protected on-the-ground by signing and maps that clearly identify land status.

By identifying the OHV open area, the intent of the travel management plan would become clearer to the public. Creation of the bicycle emphasis area would greatly reduce the user conflicts associated with shared trails.

Signature of specialist: /s/Jim Cooper - 2/12/2003

FOREST MANAGEMENT: NA

Signature of specialist: /s/ David P. Stevens – 6/25/2002

GEOLOGY AND MINERALS:

Oil and Gas

The existing 18 Road Trailhead and the proposed campground are not currently leased for oil and gas, but interest in the area has been expressed in the past. The open OHV area at the southern edge of the North Fruita Desert Plan Area is part of the Fruita Gas Storage Agreement (No. 047628). This agreement, dating to 1920, gives the owner, Xcel the right to use the underlying Dakota Formation for natural gas storage. The area could be leased for gas production from formations other than the Dakota. No facilities have been constructed on the agreement area to date, but the company has retained the agreement through the years to maintain operational flexibility to meet future natural gas storage needs for the Grand Valley.

Impact to oil and gas would be related to the NSO proposed for the existing trailhead, and the proposed campground and OHV area. The total acres in NSO would be 80 acres for the trailhead and 200 acres for the campground. Impacts from the trailhead and campground would be minimal. Any oil or gas present in those parcels could be accessed most likely by an adjacent drilling site or if necessary by directional drilling. In the event that either of these two methods could not achieve complete removal, the amount of oil or gas lost would be minimal. There is potential if the area becomes very popular with recreationists that oil and gas activity could suffer additional impacts if the two uses conflict with each other.

Coal

There is significant potential for coal development encompassing the outcrop area along the face of the Bookcliffs and Coal Gulch. Access to the coal could include using 16 and 18 Roads, or possibly a new route. In 1981, the BLM issued three coal leases for about 15,000 acres to Dorchester Coal Company. The lessee submitted a mine permit application that included extensive surface facilities on BLM-managed land near the end of 18 Road just below the Fruita Mines portal. The permit was never approved and the

leases expired. The Fruita Mines portal is closed, but the underground entries were extended across private lands to the edge of the unleased federal coal. The Coal Gulch area also was previously explored and leased for coal as part of the Dorchester leases. There has been recent interest from coal companies in looking at the drill hole data from the Dorchester leases based on the potential coal resource. Exploration data indicates extensive reserves of low-sulfur coal located in a 25-foot thick seam. If a new underground mine was proposed that utilized the 18 Road access, this would require upgrading the road for truck haulage. The operating plan for the now-defunct Dorchester proposal shows a railway spur, a conveyor line, and extensive surface facilities astride 18 Road and the Layton Wash drainage.

Siting surface facilities below the portal access near the end of 18 Road would adversely affect a campground and some of the mountain bike trails in this area. Based on this, the proposed action includes a special stipulation that would be applied to any coal lease, off-lease right-of-way, or other authorization that proposes coal surface facilities that might impact the campground and trailhead (see proposed action). Impacts to coal would be related to the special stipulation, which includes an NSO clause for the existing trailhead (80 acres), and the proposed campground (200 acres). If coal surface facilities were to impact the campground and trailhead, the special stipulation would require the coal lessee to fund the relocation of the campground and trailhead, and/or demonstrate that operations can be conducted without causing unacceptable impacts on the concern identified. Alternatively, the coal lessee may propose to loop the coal facilities around the campground and trailhead. Relocation and/or avoidance-related costs would result in higher costs to the coal company but are not expected to preclude lease operations or affect the overall economics of the mining operation.

Signature of specialist: /s/ Bruce Fowler – 9/22/2003

/s/ Dave Trappett – 9/23/2003

HYDROLOGY AND WATER RIGHTS: The hydrologic characteristics of the planning area are described in the water quality section above. A reduction in the vegetative and litter cover, coupled with soil compaction within the watershed (including the washes where trails are located) would affect the runoff characteristics in the impact area. The infiltration rate would be reduced resulting in increased overland flow. The time of concentration would also be shortened. The result would be an increase in flow within the washes and gullies and potentially increased stream scour. This channel erosion would increase sediment and salinity levels in receiving streams. Water rights are not an issue with this plan, although water storage structures would need maintenance on a more frequent basis given accelerated sediment production from the area.

Signature of specialist: /s/ Jim Scheidt - 2/6/2003

LAND STATUS/REALTY AUTHORIZATIONS: The federal government owns the surface and mineral estates of the subject lands. There are several private inholdings within the project area. The Master Title Plats indicate a number of realty authorizations

within the project area including numerous rights-of-way for natural gas pipelines, utility lines, access roads, and retention dams, as wells as coal classifications, BOR project withdrawals, and public water reserves. Responsible use of the area through education opportunities and the planned actions to identify and protect facilities in the area would ensure that none of the alternatives would conflict with existing realty authorizations. Signing all trails leading to private land, as “End of Public Route,” would reduce conflicts between federal uses and private property.

Signature of specialist: /s/ Robin Lacy – 7/29/2003

LAW ENFORCEMENT/RESOURCE PROTECTION: As addressed in the background section, the area is receiving a significant increase in users. This increase correlates to user conflicts, impacts on resources, and damage to the infrastructure. The unauthorized construction of trails is a significant problem. Better signing and the availability of visitor maps would reduce conflicts and cross country travel.

The creation of a bicycle emphasis area and the definition of the OHV open area would help reduce the impression of user conflict. The designated trail system would reduce cross country travel and reduce the proliferation of new unauthorized trails.

The friends alternative creates many parallel trails that would require additional enforcement presence.

Impacts to law enforcement would probably be greatest from the Environmental Focus Alternative because it proposes to close the most routes, has no provision for visitor information, and would require the most agency presence to work.

For further discussion of law enforcement priorities and policies see Grand Junction Field Office Law Enforcement Plan, dated 2004.

Signature of specialist: /s/ D.P. McCoy 7/21/04

PALEONTOLOGY:

The proposal would not impact paleontological resources.

Signature of specialist: /s/ Bruce Fowler – 2/12/2003

RANGE MANAGEMENT:

Common to all Alternatives: Permittees would have to adapt to the increased use of the area, however there are steps that can be taken to ensure both permittees and recreationists have a positive experience. Education of recreationists to decrease user-group conflicts should be prominently displayed in handout literature and on kiosks. All competitive and organized events should give notice to the permittees so they can make arrangements to move cattle if needed for the safety of event participants and livestock. All potential soil and vegetation impacts due to increased recreation

(any rill erosion starting from trails, trail widening, vegetation composition around trails, etc.) should be tracked through vegetative studies, land health assessment, and trail maintenance evaluation.

Multiple-Use Alternative: Open areas can prove to be beneficial when fenced, which would help to take OHV pressure off other vegetative areas along with helping to reduce sediment loading from other areas, and by reducing permanent removal of vegetation and soil compaction. These areas would also make it safer for persons wanting the off-road experience, who are concentrating on the jumps and more difficult terrain.

All additional trails should be coordinated with the range staff and, when crossing the electric fence separating two pastures, a recreation cattle guard should be placed to help ensure the pasture fence stays up.

Environmental Alternative: Protection of the riparian values of East Salt Creek and the upper reach of Big Salt Creek within the planning area, as well as closure of all OHV Open areas proposed in the Environmental Focus Alternative, would benefit range condition by removing a major source of soil compaction and vegetation removal. However, no alternative would have a significant affect or impact one way or the other on the grazing management of the area.

Signature of specialist: Lynae Rogers – 2/19/2/2003

RECREATION:

Affected Environment: The area affected by the proposed action lies entirely within the North Fruita Desert Intensive Recreation Management Area. A wide variety of recreational activities takes place in this area in multiple settings. The primary activities taking place include OHV use, hiking, mountain biking, horseback riding, camping, hunting, and target shooting. Traffic counter derived data would indicate upwards of 50,000 recreationists per year visit the area.

Multiple-Use Alternative: The management direction and management actions being proposed as part of the preferred alternative would have varying degrees of impact to the recreational opportunities present in the area. Phasing-in of a closure on parallel and stem trails should result in a decrease in the number of less attractive motorized recreational routes through time, while allowing users to adjust their trail riding habits to eventual closure. The long-term impact on recreational motorized users would be fewer miles of routes; however, those that remain would be well signed and would likely see periodic maintenance to allow for unrestricted use. The strategy of signing, handout maps and portal kiosk displays would tend to decrease the number of motorized users getting lost and going cross-country. With fewer roads and trails and greater trail use compliance, less soil compaction and vegetative damage would occur.

The implementation of the preferred alternative would in general reduce the attractiveness of the area to those recreationists wanting a custodial-only government presence and management approach, and therefore would likely displace some

irresponsible users to other less intensively managed areas. It would, in turn, likely increase the use of the area by more responsible users. Those wishing to camp overnight in a self-directed fashion and to have traditional camp fires wherever they choose to camp at the end of 18 Road, would be negatively impacted by the proposed managed campground facility. The majority of people, however, would likely use the campground and would respect the Agency's commitment to decreasing resource damage created by unrestricted camping

Creating bicycle and hiker/equestrian emphasis areas would tend to decrease conflict between user groups by zoning. If the overall plan is viewed by the recreational public as fair, that would increase the probability that the emphasis zones would be honored.

Creating new multiple-use, single-track trails would have the general affect of increasing the quality of motorcycle-based recreation in the area. Key linkages and loops would be created for this use. One likely outcome of this approach would be a decreased potential for motorcyclists to impinge on the bicycle and hiker/equestrian emphasis areas because their recreational needs would be better met.

The shared use (motorcycle/bicycle) trails at the east and west edges of the bicycle area would give motorcycles access to the rolling, more vegetated terrain at the toe of the Bookcliffs and give them a northern connection between 18 and 21 Roads. Bicyclists would feel that they had lost portions of two trails that they had considered their own and would perceive an increasing threat from motorcycle traffic on the rest of their trails.

Constructing a new primitive campground at the end of 18 Road would decrease the spread of pioneering camping sites and would reduce vegetation, soils, and human health and safety impacts. Those wanting a less-managed approach would be displaced to camping alternatives elsewhere, potentially to areas even less appropriate for their use. The majority of campers would appreciate the site management and maintenance and would respect the facilities provided, doing their best to help with upkeep.

By using the BLM Special Recreation Permit system, the BLM would be placing both present and future applicants on notice that a higher degree of scrutiny would be applied to permit requests. Denying requests that adversely impact present uses and trails would tend to maintain the ambiance and trail configurations that recreationists enjoy at present.

Bureau of Reclamation water control structures would be less threatened by recreational vandalism with the use of designated routes to funnel most traffic away from the Highline Canal.

Fencing the OHV open area and the roads to the north and northeast would have the affect of limiting the growth of unrestricted off highway activity in that area. By providing a vault toilet facility, parking area, and educational/instructional/regulatory signing, the staging needs of motorized users would be met to the same degree as the bicyclists presently enjoy. Many users would appreciate and respect these facilities. Others would look upon them as symbols of governmental presence and management and would register their displeasure through vandalism.

With the installation of informational/educational/regulatory kiosks, the public would better understand the rules of use and would be better oriented as they enter the area. Many users would appreciate and respect this approach to visitor management. Those wanting a less-managed area would either be displaced elsewhere, potentially to areas less suitable to their use, or would register their displeasure through vandalism.

Installing a lockable gate at the county gravel site would aid in ongoing restoration of the area. Some shooters accustomed to using the site would be displaced.

No Action Alternative: Selection of the No Action Alternative would continue the present custodial management of the North Fruita Desert Area. Off-highway vehicles would be limited to existing roads and trails, but with no signing or orientation maps available to tell recreationists where they are and what trails are existing, the continuing spread of additional routes would be a forgone conclusion. Camping would continue to occur in a haphazard sprawl. Impacts to natural resource and human health and safety would continue and would likely increase with an increasing camping population in the future. The practice of constructing user-created trails without involving the Agency in environmental evaluation of the locations and consequences would continue. Conflicts between user groups would remain, with the potential for incursions into other groups' chosen trails and sites.

Environmental Focus Alternative: Selection of the Environmental Focus Alternative would lessen density of trail systems, closure of the OHV open area, designation of shooting areas, and creation of a hiker/equestrian emphasis zone. This alternative would focus on binary trail designations, whereby a trail is either open or closed, with no transition or phasing towards abandonment of lesser-used, stem, or parallel trails. Although most trail users would abide with such an approach, some mechanized or motorized trail users would feel that trail access had been limited in a draconian fashion and they would likely ignore some closures. Shooters, hikers and horseback riders would benefit from this alternative while trail-use groups would either not be affected or adversely affected, depending on their view of the fairness of the closures.

Friends of the North Fruita Desert Alternative: This alternative focuses on shared motorcyclist/bicyclist objectives in preserving single-track trail, creating new parallel routes to avoid conflict and to maintain unrestricted access onto private lands. Use areas would likely be respected through this alternative, as the linkage needs of the motorcycling community would be provided for. Bicyclists would be confident that their trail areas would remain largely un-impacted by motor vehicles. Responsibility to negotiate land acquisitions, easements, trades, or purchases to safeguard access onto private land routes would fall on the BLM. With higher priority lands actions ongoing, it is unlikely that these transactions would be consummated in a time frame satisfactory to the recreational public. The BLM would be in the position of supporting trespass onto private lands until route decisions are made, a position that is contrary to the Agency's authority.

Signature of specialist: /s/ Jim Cooper 7/21/04

SOCIOECONOMIC CONSIDERATIONS:

Affected Environment: The area most likely to feel the socioeconomic effects of management changes in the North Fruita Desert Area is Mesa County, in particular the Grand Valley where most of the population resides. Mesa County is the largest population center between Denver and Salt Lake City. Its population has been growing rapidly for the last 10 to 15 years, just like much of the rest of Colorado. (This information and that which follows is from a report, *The Socioeconomic Effect Recreation Uses in the North Fruita Desert*, prepared for BLM. A copy is on file in the Grand Junction Field Office.) The county's 2.2 percent annual rate of growth throughout the 1990's produced a year 2002 population of 122,463. Fruita, the westernmost incorporated community in Mesa County, grew at a much more rapid rate than the county, averaging 4.8 percent annually through the 1990's. In 2002, Fruita's population was 7,270.

The county economy has evolved over the last 30 years in much the same way that the state economy has. Employment has grown in the Services and Construction sectors and has declined in Agriculture, Government and Manufacturing. Today, the economy is dominated by the Services, Retail Trade and Government sectors, which together make up almost 63 percent of all the jobs in the county. A signal difference between Mesa County's employment picture and Colorado's is the relatively large share of those who work that are self-employed. Almost a quarter of the county workforce is self-employed, whereas only a fifth of all employees in Colorado are self-employed. Another striking characteristic of the local economy is that thirty-seven percent of Mesa County's personal income is derived from non-labor sources, dividends, interest, rent and transfer payments (retirement and disability payments, medical payments, unemployment insurance benefits, income maintenance payments, veterans benefits, gifts and loans).

Tourism is a significant element of Colorado's economy and it's increasingly becoming important to Mesa County's economy. This is important because tourism, like mining, manufacturing, and agriculture, is considered a "basic" economic activity – one that brings "new" money in from outside the economy. It is this "new" money that allows an economy to grow. The growing popularity of mountain biking on BLM lands in Mesa County is contributing to the increase in tourism. Table 1 shows the current economic contribution of mountain biking and other recreation in the North Fruita Desert.

The total economic impact of recreation use in the North Fruita Desert is estimated at \$689,607 annually, which is associated with 33 Mesa County jobs. Over 90 percent of the impact is produced by mountain biking because more participants in that activity come from outside the area. Their expenditures are thus new to the local economy. The amount of non-local participation in OHV use and other recreation is low because the opportunities presented by the North Fruita Desert for these activities are not unique and thus do not draw receptionists from outside the county.

While these numbers are small relative to the entire economy of Mesa County, they are important nonetheless since they are part of the matrix of outdoor recreation and scenic resources that draw tourists to the area. Moreover, an increasing number of the jobs and much of the income are likely going to residents and businesses located in Fruita and western Mesa County where their impact may bear more weight.

Table 1: Estimated Economic Impact of Recreation Use in the North Fruita Desert, 2003				
	Mountain Biking	OHV Use	Other Recreation	Total
Annual Number of Trips	25,573	6,000	19,702	51,275
% Non-local Use	50	10	5	
Non-local Use	12,787	600	985	14,372
Expenditure/Visit	\$85.42	\$93.10	\$56.94	
Annual Expenditures	\$1,092,223	\$55,860	\$56,092	\$1,204,174
Direct Effect				
Income	\$335,933	\$14,494	\$14,554	\$364,981
Jobs	20	1	1	22
Indirect Effect				
Income	\$298,649	\$12,962	\$13,015	\$324,626
Jobs	10	0.5	0.5	11
Total Effect				
Income	\$634,582	\$27,456	\$27,570	\$689,607
Jobs	30	1	1	33

It should also be noted that the context for evaluating socioeconomic contributions of public lands is broader than the jobs and income created by “new” money. Many residents feel that the easy access to a variety of outdoor recreation experiences is one of the things that enhances the quality of life in Mesa County. The North Fruita Desert, along with the Colorado Canyons NCA, is one of a group of focus areas including, among others, the Colorado National Monument, the Grand Mesa, and Glade Park, that provide the mix of outdoor experiences that residents value so highly.

Environmental Consequences and Mitigation

One of the primary factors influencing future recreation use in the North Fruita Desert area will be local and state population growth. It is expected that the population of Colorado will increase 40 percent by the year 2020 and that the population of Mesa County may increase by over 50 percent. Population growth in the Grand Valley will bring about increased recreation use in the North Fruita Desert because of its proximity. Population growth outside Mesa County may have an even greater impact on use as the area becomes more well-known. It already has substantial non-local use and the non-local share of use could well increase as its “market share” increases. The North Fruita Desert is a relatively new area and its reputation is just being made. As word of the area spreads, receptionists who might have gone elsewhere, like Moab, instead may opt to discover the North Fruita Desert.

Table 2 displays projected recreation use in the North Fruita Desert in the year 2020 and the associated economic impact if mountain biking were to grow at a rate somewhat greater than population growth – a 3.0 percent growth rate as opposed to 2.2 percent – and other uses were to grow at the same rate as the population.

The projected 79,489 visitors in 2020 is 55 percent more than total visitation in 2003, but non-local use more than doubles, growing from 14,372 to 29,954. About \$2.5 million in annual expenditures (2003 dollars) would support 67 jobs and almost \$1.5 million in local income. These amounts would remain relatively small components of the Grand Valley economy (less than one percent) because the economy would continue to grow at or near the same rate as visitor use. However, the economic impact on Fruita and western Mesa County is likely to be stronger than it is currently. The number of Fruita-area businesses that are tied to recreation activity in the North Fruita Desert would likely have increased by 2020. Thus expenditures by non-locals for gasoline, lodging, meals and equipment would more likely be spent in the Fruita area.

<i>Table 2: Estimated Economic Impact of Recreation Use in the North Fruita Desert, 2020</i>				
	Mountain Biking	OHV Use	Other Recreation	Total
Annual Use	42,272	8,688	28,528	79,489
% Non-local Use	60	20	10	
Non-local Use	25,363	1,738	2,853	29,954
Expenditure/Visit	\$85.42	\$93.10	\$56.94	
Annual Expenditures	\$2,166,533	\$161,771	\$162,441	\$2,490,745
Direct Effect				
Income	\$666,357	\$41,975	\$42,149	\$750,481
Jobs	40	2	2	44
Indirect Effect				
Income	\$592,399	\$37,537	\$37,693	\$667,629
Jobs	20	1	1	23
Total Effect				
Income	\$1,258,757	\$79,512	\$79,842	\$1,418,110
Jobs	60	4	3	67

The figures in Table 2 represent the projected economic impact of pursuing a management strategy that would make few changes in the day-to-day operation and use of the North Fruita Desert planning area, the No Action alternative. All of the alternative management proposals for the North Fruita Desert would continue to allow current recreation activities to continue and none of them would explicitly limit growth of recreation use. Therefore, the economic impacts associated with each alternative would be marginal increases or decreases from the levels described in Table 2. To the extent that an alternative limited the amount of trails or constrained use, the impacts would be less. On the other hand, to the extent that recreation experiences were enhanced, recreation use and its consequent economic impacts would increase.

SOILS:

Affected Environment: Local geology has played a dominant role in the types of soils that have been developed in this area, and the topography on which they occur. Marine shales and sandstones of the Mancos Shale Formation are the primary parent materials; sediments and colluvium from the Mesa Verde Formation, which forms the upper escarpments of the Bookcliffs, have also influenced soil development and characteristics. Soils developing in Mancos Shale materials are generally high in salts and sodium and have textures high in silt and clay. Often a thin, fine sandy loam surface horizon is present. The soils have slow permeability rates; concentrated runoff from storm events or snowmelt usually causes the most erosion and sediment production, primarily from the existing gully systems. Where the more sandy and stony alluvium or colluvium from the Mesa Verde Formation is present as pediment or ridge surficial material, soils do not have the high salt/alkali levels associated with the Mancos Formation, soil textures are sandier, and permeability is much greater. These soils are subject to more rapid erosion from recreational causes. Vegetation cover, however, is generally greater than that on the Mancos-derived soils, and erosion from natural sources is generally lower.

Watershed studies document a three- to eight-fold greater rate of erosion and sediment production from the moderately to steeply sloping, shallow Mancos shale-derived soils, than from the less sloping soils, soils derived from sandier materials, or those with better vegetative cover. The Badlands, Persayo, and Chipeta soils map units yield the highest rates of soil loss (7.5 to 15.0 tons of sediment per acre) while the Avalon, Youngston, and Uffens soils on average undergo 1.8 to 3.0 tons of sediment loss per acre. A great number of check dams, gully plugs, range pitting, and other sediment control/runoff retention measures have been applied to the North Fruita Desert Area and the area adjacent to the east. This has been in response to RMP goals and basin-wide legislation addressing the need to reduce salinity in the Colorado River. Reduction of sediment (and the salts it contains) is an on-going concern, and BLM management of the Mancos shale areas would continue to receive scrutiny, particularly in view of the effects of salinity on water quality regarding threatened and endangered fish species, agricultural use, and drinking water. Therefore, any management plan must take into account its affect on these issues.

Environmental Consequences and Mitigation: Recreational use by ATVs, other off-highway vehicles, motorcycles, mountain bikes, and horseback riders have an obvious impact on the soil resource. Where concentrated use takes place, loss of vegetation cover, loss of soil health, and accelerated erosion are the result. There are certain factors that mitigate the degree of these impacts but not to the extent that they can be considered minimal. The arid climate limits the times in which soils are wet, and the scattered nature and usually short duration of rainfall events reduce the impact of recreational use on the soil surface during the time they are wet. Because of the high content of sodium salts and lime, and the relatively high clay content, surface materials often “seal” and are somewhat more resistant to detachment or displacement. Locating and designing trails

and roads along the contour and in a manner that does not concentrate runoff, or in areas less prone to receiving concentrated runoff, should be a high-priority goal. Exposures of sparsely vegetated Mancos shale parent material (Badlands) are scattered throughout the area, and poor trail placement in such areas often results in accelerated erosion and sediment production. These mitigation practices apply to all alternatives considered within this proposal.

Soils on the ridges and dissected alluvial fans nearer the Bookcliffs generally contain stone and gravel. Many of the soils have an extremely stony surface. These materials serve to reduce soil loss from the concentrated use impact on roads and trails. Locating roads and trails along the contour, and erosion control practices, such as water bars, greatly help to reduce potential erosion and the amount of sediment produced.

Biological crusts are present throughout the area, most often as fragmented or discontinuous patches. They protect the surface soils from particle detachment by raindrops and from wind erosion; however, they can also reduce the spread or presence of vegetative cover. These crusts are fragile and are easily destroyed by recreational uses. They benefit from management that limits these uses to existing or planned roads and trails.

Signature of specialist: Tom Bargsten - 2/1/2003

VISUAL RESOURCES:

Affected Environment: The North Fruita plan area includes a variety of visual resources ranging from the barren desert landscape north of the Highline canal, to the pinyon-juniper forest at the toe of the slope to the sandstone cliffs overlooking the area. The desert portion is undifferentiated according to Visual Resource Management (VRM) classification. The cliffs and toe slopes are classified as VRM Class III, a designation that allows for the partial retention of the existing landscape character. Changes in the landscape are allowed but should not attract the attention of the casual observer.

Environmental Consequences and Mitigation: The actions proposed in any of the alternatives can generally be designed and sited to meet the objectives of these VRM classes.

Signature of specialist: B Laub 7/21/04

WILDLIFE, AQUATIC: Building and maintaining salinity/sediment retention structures down slope of the trails would help mitigate the trail system impacts of increased salinity/sediment on the Colorado River fishes, including the four federally listed species

Signature of specialist: /s/ David Smith – 5/19/2003

WILDLIFE, TERRESTRIAL: The year-around resident wildlife that characterizes the desert within the planning area includes, but is not limited to, desert cottontail rabbit, white-tailed prairie dog, Ord's kangaroo rat, coyote, kit fox, American badger, long-tailed weasel, pronghorn antelope, golden eagles, ferruginous hawk, prairie falcon, and horned lark. A few species occur only or primarily in the cooler months, e.g., elk, mule deer, and merlin (a falcon). During the warmer months the population of wildlife increases due to the appearance of hibernators and southern migrants.

Developments to assist human recreation on natural lands present a mixed bag of effects to wildlife. Inducing people to come to natural lands likely results in some of them seeing wildlife and developing an appreciation for it. This promotes human behavior that benefits wildlife. However, increasing human traffic and dispersing it results in there being fewer places for wildlife to carry out life processes. Generally, the larger the animal, the more space it requires for its life processes. Black bear, elk, mule deer, and pronghorn antelope are the largest animals regularly using the planning area. The first three cling to the area along the Bookcliffs with occasional trips south along East and Big Salt Washes. All alternatives would limit route developments within those washes, with the possible one new crossing Big Salt Wash at the north edge of the plan area.

The No Action Alternative is the least attractive one for wildlife, because it lacks most of the impact eliminating measures present in the other alternatives. It would not have the signage to cultivate a human population sensitive to wildlife possibilities and needs.

The Multiple-Use and Friends of the NFD Alternatives have positive features for wildlife. Attempting to shift recreational pressure northward away from Highline Canal may help to preserve a west-east travel corridor for pronghorns as the private lands along 16 Road are developed for residences. One tactic for doing this is by designing an OHV area along Highline Canal. Instead of adding to the traffic problem, it should draw trail riding traffic to a more confined space. This, coupled with roadside fencing sending 18 Road traffic farther north, should improve the pronghorn travel corridor (the fence design would be passable to pronghorns). Using the EPA prescription, vegetation production should not become the limiting factor for any species of wildlife present. Wildlife would be able to adjust to the increased human presence if pioneering, cross-country travel becomes rare. The designated routes prescription offers a better assurance that the habitat at any particular site will remain intact. The sudden popularity of the juniper terraces along the Bookcliffs at 18 Road with mountain bikers and campers has impacted big game use there in the spring. The more critical big game range farther northwest remains relatively undeveloped for recreation under the Multiple-Use and Friends of the NFD Alternatives. Prohibiting solid fuel campfires should allow the juniper savannah to persist, maintaining the habitat of woodland wildlife (grasshopper mouse, juniper titmouse, gray vireo, mountain bluebird, Scott's oriole are some high interest species). Designating areas to emphasize different activities should provide sanctuary for wildlife able to adjust to some types of activity better than to others. Where this results in multiplied routes and wider distribution of use, it is more harmful than helpful to wildlife. The Friends of the NFD Alternative offers a greater chance for this than does the Multiple-Use option. Closing roads that lead to private land trespass would, at least temporarily, provide more solitude for wildlife. The Friends of the NFD Alternative

would delay solving this issue. Also the Friends of the NFD Alternative would create more miles of trail to separate mountain bikers from motorized vehicles. This also, from a wildlife perspective, makes it less favored than the Multiple-Use option. Under Multiple-Use, the designated routes prescription provides the good assurance for maintaining wildlife habitat.

The Environmental Focus Alternative contains elements that, if feasible and implemented, would benefit wildlife. 1) A policy to close trails at least temporarily if they threaten burrowing owls, 2) A greater emphasis on non-motorized travel probably resulting in less traffic, 3) The 100 foot riparian buffer, 4) a lower effort to meet vehicular recreation needs, and 5) Closing OHV open areas would all allow more wildlife to remain in the area. The proposed area "closed to mechanized travel" offers the chance to keep and improve a sanctuary for chukar partridges and associated wildlife species. Closing all OHV open areas has the drawback of eliminating the chance to create a fenced area to contain cross-country travel. The features of the Environmental Focus Alternative make this an attractive alternative for the management of wildlife habitat.

The two eliminated alternatives had strong wildlife rationales for their elimination. Preserving the deer and elk critical winter range north of Coal Canyon and keeping trails out of uppermost Layton Wash are important gestures toward keeping big game in the area.

The North Fruita Desert Planning area contains no habitat suitable for Sage Grouse.

Signature of specialist: /s/ Ron Lambeth – 7/19/2004

CUMULATIVE IMPACTS: *(The effects of a proposed action on a given resource, ecosystem, and human community include the present and future effects added to the effects that have taken place in the past.)*

The North Fruita Desert has a long history of land management actions. From extensive long-term grazing to coal mining to oil and gas production and now to motorized and mechanized recreation, the desert shows on-the-ground affect from these activities. The overall affect of the multiple use alternative would be to formalize and make more permanent activities, which have been on going in the desert. The proposed campground would likely make the present dispersed camping pattern less transient, with facilities and armoring of use surfaces to allow for human use with lesser impact. Whereas the construction of more intermediate-level bicycle trails would increase use of the designated bicycle area, rehabilitation of other trails would lead to less soil erosion, and fewer safety hazards. Construction of the four miles of singletrack parallel to Coal Gulch Road along the crest of the Bookcliffs would open this area to both motorized and non-motorized traffic in an area that has not seen such use. It would, however, displace that use from the Coal Gulch Road and would have human safety and lesser soil erosion advantages. The multiple use alternative would have no effect on the likelihood that subdivision activity would probably occur in the near future on some privately owned parcels which predominate between Colorado Highway 139 and 18 Road. In comparison

to future potential actions such as private land sub-development, renewal of coal mining or major oil and gas activity, the proposed actions would have little cumulative impact on the North Fruita Desert environment.

PERSONS/AGENCIES CONSULTED:

North Fruita Desert Citizen Ad-Hoc Committee - comprised of:

Amy Agapito, Mesa County Cycling Association
Doug Buniger, Colorado Plateau Mountain Bike Trail Assoc.
Kevin Foote, Grand Valley Mountain Bike Patrol
Charlie Sweet, Motorcycle Trail Riding Association
Steve Chapel, Western Slope ATV Association
John Potter, Bookcliff Rattlers Motorcycle Club
Ed Gunderson, Landowner/Rancher
Kim Albertson, Landowner/Rancher
Joe Bernal, Private landowner
Cricket Donoho, Horseback rider
Susan Claffey, Colorado Environmental Coalition
N.J. Fulmer, Sierra Club
Dusty Dunbar, City of Fruita
Chris Foreman, Highline Lake State Park
Jim Majors, hiker, mountain biker
Matt Powers, OHV, shooter
Ron Brock, shooter
Colorado Division of Wildlife

Northwest Resource Advisory Council Members of Ad-Hoc Committee

Ken Currey (OHV)

BLM Interdisciplinary Team

Jim Cooper, Team Leader/Writer
Britta Laub, Supervisory Outdoor Recreation Planner
Chris Pipkin, Field Recreation Concerns and Mapping
Andy Windsor, Field Recreation Concerns and Mapping
D. P. McCoy, Law Enforcement
Ron Lambeth, Wildlife
Dave Smith, Fisheries, T & E Species
Lynae Rogers, Range
Steve Moore, socio-economic

Tom Bargsten, Soils
Mike Berry, Archaeology
Wayne Bankert, Oil and Gas
Bruce Fowler, Geology, Minerals
Jim Scheidt, Hydrology
Harley Metz, Ecology
Alan Kraus, Hazardous Materials
Dave Stephens, NEPA

**DECISION RECORD
AND
FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT**

CO-GJFO-02-08-EA

**North Fruita Desert Management Plan
No Surface Occupancy Stipulation**

**USDI Bureau of Land Management
Grand Junction Field Office**

Mesa County, Colorado

INTRODUCTION: This document describes my decision and rationale for the North Fruita Desert (NFD) Management Plan, specifically for the change in mineral lease stipulations (coal, oil and gas operations) on those public lands within the planning area administered by the Grand Junction Field Office. Under the regulations of the Council on Environmental Quality for implementation of the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) of 1969, an Environmental Assessment (EA) has been prepared to determine if the Selected Alternative might cause significant environmental impacts. The EA was prepared to evaluate two actions – the establishment of a No Surface Occupancy (NSO) mineral lease stipulation on sites with recreation developments (this decision) and designating individual travel routes within the NFD plan area (see accompanying decision).

My decision and finding are based on the EA of the proposed actions and alternatives for the NFD plan and the goals and objectives stated in the Grand Junction Resource Management Plan (RMP). My selected alternative is the Multiple Use Alternative.

This decision, the establishment of a NSO stipulation on 280 acres within the planning area, is a land use allocation and is subject to a plan amendment. This is a protestable decision.

BACKGROUND: The 72,656 acre planning area is located north of Fruita, Colorado. The current mineral lease stipulations are shown in the following table:

Stipulation	Acres applied to
No Surface Occupancy	5,607
scenic and natural values	16,613
Steep Slopes	8,539
water quality (perennial streams)	218
deer and elk winter range	8,239
threatened and endangered habitat	8,534

The Selected Alternative is to add 280 acres to the No Surface Occupancy stipulation where no other stipulations currently exist to protect BLM investments from mineral development and loss of BLM recreation site investment. The No Surface Occupancy (NSO) stipulation would be instituted to protect 280 acres including the trailhead on 18

Road and the campground at the north end of 18 Road. The legal description of the NSO stipulation area is as follows: T8S R101W Sec.30 SE ¼ NE ¼, SW1/4 NE1/4 NW1/4 SE1/4, SW1/4 SE1/4 T8S R101W Sec.31 NW1/4 NE1/4 T8S R101 Sec.31 SE ¼ SW1/4 T9S R101W Sec.6 NE1/4 NW1/4.

DECISION: It is my decision to establish a No Surface Occupancy stipulation on mineral leases on 280 acres as described in the Final North Fruita Desert Plan dated August 2004. This decision is a component of the Multiple Use Alternative/Selected Alternative as described on page 28 of the plan and on page 48-49 of the EA.

RATIONALE: The addition of 280 acres to the NSO mineral lease stipulation will best balance recreational demands with resource management needs, RMP goals, NFD goals and objectives, and will protect BLM's recreation infrastructure and development investments. My decision to select the Multiple Use Alternative is based on the findings and analysis in the EA, including supporting documentation, and extensive public participation and involvement in this project.

FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT (FONSI): The EA, analyzing the environmental effects of the Selected Alternative, has been reviewed. The proposal results in a Finding of No Significant Impact on the human environment. Therefore, an environmental impact statement is not necessary to further analyze the environmental effects of the Selected Alternative.

SIGNATURE OF RECOMMENDING OFFICIAL:



Catherine Robertson
Field Manager
Grand Junction Field Office

November 8, 2004
Date

SIGNATURE OF AUTHORIZED OFFICIAL:



Ron Wenker, State Director
Colorado BLM

November 8, 2004
Date

**DECISION RECORD
AND
FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT**

CO-GJFO-02-08-EA

**North Fruita Desert Management Plan
Designation of Roads and Trails**

**USDI Bureau of Land Management
Grand Junction Field Office**

Mesa County, Colorado

INTRODUCTION: This document describes my decision and rationale for the North Fruita Desert (NFD) Management Plan for the designation of roads and trails on public lands administered by the Grand Junction Field Office (GJFO). Under the regulations of the Council on Environmental Quality for implementation of the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) of 1969, an Environmental Assessment (EA) was prepared to determine if the Selected Alternative might cause significant environmental impacts to the human environment. The EA was prepared to evaluate two actions – designating individual travel routes within the NFD plan area (this decision), and the establishment of a No Surface Occupancy (NSO) lease stipulation on developed recreation sites (see accompanying decision).

My decision and finding are based on the EA of the proposed actions and alternatives for the NFD plan and the goals and objectives stated in the Grand Junction Resource Management Plan (RMP). My selected alternative is the Multiple Use Alternative.

During the preparation of the EA, BLM policy changed on the designation of routes for OHV use. The new policy states that the designation of routes is an implementation decision that is no longer subject to a plan amendment. In contrast, the designation of areas as Open, Limited, or Closed is still subject to a plan amendment. The designation of routes and the revision of some travel management regulations are now subject to the appeal regulations.

A separate decision is being issued concurrently with this decision on the establishment of a NSO stipulation on developed sites. The establishment of a NSO stipulation is a land use allocation and is subject to a plan amendment. This is a protestable decision.

BACKGROUND: The 72,656 acre planning area is located north of Fruita, Colorado. The current travel management regulations for most of the NFD area limit OHV travel to existing roads and trails (72,235 acres). The remainder of the area is designated as open to cross country OHV travel (435 acres).

The Selected Alternative is to designate a system of roads and trails in the NFD planning area and to manage the Open OHV area more intensively. The designated roads and trails will become part of BLM's official transportation system. This action designates the specific routes for motorized, mechanized, and non-motorized/non-mechanized use and revises some travel management regulations.

DECISION: It is my decision to implement the travel management actions described in the Final North Fruita Desert Plan dated August 2004. The plan is derived from the Multiple Use Alternatives described on pages 45-50 of the EA with the following changes:

Recreation - No solid fuel fires will be allowed outside of fire rings provided in the designated camping facility. Fires outside of the bicycle emphasis area must be contained in a fire pan. Fire pans are metal containers elevated off the ground that contain a fire and facilitate the removal of the ashes. Liquid and gas fueled fires are allowed. No cutting or gathering of native vegetation will be allowed.

No target shooting will be allowed in the bicycle emphasis area, except for the lawful taking of game during bonafide hunting seasons.

No camping is allowed in the mechanized emphasis area except in designated campsites. Dispersed camping will continue to be allowed in the remaining portions of the planning area.

Recreation Permits (SRP's) - Permitted recreation events will be required to use designated routes only.

Travel and Access - The Multiple-Use Alternative will allow for approximately 35 miles of trails within a mechanized emphasis area (located within portions of T8S R102W sec. 24, 25, and 36, T9S R102W sec.1, T8S R101W sec. 28, 29, 30, 31, 32, 33, 34, and 35, T9S R101W sec.3, 4, 5, and 6), will create a non-motorized/non-mechanized emphasis area (located within portions of T8S R101W sec. 35 and 36, T9S R101W sec.1, 2, 3, 9, 10, 11, 12, and 14, T9S R100W sec. 5, 6, 7, and 8) will provide approximately 14 ½ miles of new multiple-use routes that will make trail connections and add to the flexibility of the route design, will close 65 miles of routes, and will provide two miles of new mechanized trails in addition to the existing trails within the mechanized emphasis area.

The travel management prescription will be designated routes for all motorized and mechanized travelers. Administrative routes will be identified for use by BLM and permittees. Designated routes may be prescribed for hikers and equestrians (non-motorized/non-mechanized) if impacts warrant at a future date. Travel within 72,000 acres in the NFD will be limited to designated roads and trails rather than existing roads and trails.

Wildlife - The Lippan Wash Trail will be seasonally closed from December 1 until April 1 of each year. The opening date may be moved to an earlier or later date if conditions warrant. The new construction trail parallel to Coal Gulch Road will be seasonally closed consistent with the wildlife closure in Lippan Wash. The public will be directed to use Hunter Canyon as an alternate route to Lippan Wash during the closure period.

Noxious Weeds - Measures are focused on trail-related proposals as well as on measures identified by discipline in the EA. All construction equipment shall be clean and free of weed seed prior to moving equipment onto public lands. Radiators, tracks, tires, air pre-cleaners, blades, rippers, buckets, and any flat surface on machines that accumulate debris shall be washed clean.

MONITORING: Develop and implement a plan to monitor types and levels of use on all routes, inventory and treat new weed infestations on designated routes, and monitor use of non-system routes and vehicle use off designated routes and rehabilitate these routes.

RATIONALE: The designated routes found in the Multiple Use Alternative will best balance recreational demands with resource management needs, RMP goals, and NFD goals and objectives. My decision in choosing the Selected Alternative with the aforementioned change is based on the findings and analysis in the EA, including supporting documentation, and extensive public participation and involvement in this project. Approximately 20 meetings with either the ad hoc committee or a trails subcommittee and one field trip occurred during the planning process. BLM received over 800 comment letters regarding this plan.

Increased use typically results in a concurrent increased level of management. The Selected Alternative was found to be the best mix of actions in order to meet and manage the recreational demand while managing other resources.

Recreation - User created fire rings have multiplied as have their resource impacts. By building and siting fire rings according to campground design, the recreation setting and experience will improve and resource impacts will be reduced. Requiring fire pans will reduce the amount of soil that is sterilized by fire and will reduce maintenance needs. By prohibiting cutting and gathering of native vegetation, wildlife habitat will improve and the desired recreation setting will be maintained. Eliminating target shooting in the mechanized emphasis area will reduce conflicts between these user groups. By developing a primitive campground and establishing conditions of use, resource damage will decline (loss/cutting of vegetation, spread of weeds, human waste issues). Requiring the use of designated camping sites in the mechanized emphasis area will reduce dispersed camping impacts as described, above. SRP holders are held to the same standard as casual users and are required to use the designated route system.

Travel and Access - By designing, constructing, and maintaining purpose-built trails, BLM will manage our resources including recreation opportunities in a sustainable manner. By segregating various trail uses in specific units, user conflict will diminish

and trails will be built with specific users in mind (motorcycle vs. mountain bike trail design). Administrative routes serve a different purpose than recreation routes. By establishing administrative routes, various construction standards can be met while avoiding user conflict. Adaptive management allows for the BLM to remain proactive rather than reactive and is a tool which will be used should use of the non-motorized/non-mechanized area reach a level where tighter management controls are necessary to protect the resource and/or the visitor experience.

Wildlife - Seasonal closures/limitations are a tool to allow for timeframe-specific recreational use of an area while not compromising wildlife and habitat management objectives.

Noxious Weeds - Users of the public land resources are responsible for helping to maintain/promoting a healthy rangeland. Noxious weeds are a threat to healthy rangelands and proactive measures will be taken to reduce their spread.

As discussed in the socioeconomic section of the EA, recreational use of the NFD contributed approximately \$690,000 to the local economy in 2003. By managing the NFD according this plan, BLM will help build a sustainable economy through sustainable recreation opportunities.

FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT (FONSI): The EA, analyzing the environmental effects of the Selected Alternative, has been reviewed. The proposal results in a Finding of No Significant Impact on the human environment. Therefore, an environmental impact statement is not necessary to further analyze the environmental effects of the Selected Alternative.

SIGNATURE OF AUTHORIZED OFFICIAL:



Catherine Robertson
Field Manager
Grand Junction Field Office

11/8/04
Date

Grand Junction RMP Implementation Worksheet

(Green Sheet)

Resource_____ Prepared By_____ Date

RMP Decision Id_____ ROD Page number

OBJECTIVE:

PLANNED MANAGEMENT ACTION:

Weed Prevention Stipulation for

Surface Disturbance Projects

Grand Junction Field Office

Vehicles and heavy equipment are one of the primary agents for the spread of noxious weed seed to public lands. In efforts to mitigate the spread of weed seed to BLM lands the following actions are required for contractors prior to transport for BLM projects.

Support vehicles (pickups, fuel/service vehicles, transports, dump trucks, etc.)

- Pressure wash radiator to flush seeds.
- Pressure wash undercarriage and tires to remove accumulations of mud and soil that may contain seeds.

Heavy Equipment (dozers, road graders, excavators, backhoes, loaders, etc.)

- Pressure wash radiator(s) to flush seeds.
- Pressure wash tracks to remove accumulations of soil.
- Pressure wash all areas of soil/debris accumulations (i.e. steps)
- Pressure wash blades and buckets where soil/mud is accumulated.
- Empty pre-cleaners (air intake) before transport.

By following the above guidelines, the amount of seed spread and subsequent new infestations would decline. These are particularly important if a piece of equipment is coming from out-of-state.

North Fruita Desert Plan Response to Recurring Themes in Comments

Many comments included the claim that existing bicycle trails would be opened to motorized use if the plan were adopted as written. This is not the case and is just the opposite in the plan. Under current regulation all trails are open to all visitors. The Bookcliffs mountain bike trails are currently open to motorized use. After the plan is adopted as written these trails will be included in the bicycle emphasis area and motorized access will be denied.

Several of the comments mentioned an expansion of a motorized “sacrifice zone.” BLM does not manage sacrifice zones. The 1987 Resource management Plan (RMP) does establish a 400-acre area that is open to cross country travel. This area is located just

north of the canal at 18 Road. None of the alternatives in the draft plan call for expansion of this open area. In fact the plan calls for the area to be fenced and signed to identify it and contain the cross country travel to the designated area.

Many commenters expressed the opinion that motorized recreation has more negative impact to the environment than other uses and should be discouraged. Research in the field does not support this assertion. The primary factor influencing impacts from recreation is how well managed the recreation activity is, and how many participants are involved per unit time. The plan is designed to better manage all recreational impacts and thereby reduce negative impacts from all recreational activities.

The issue of additional trails in Hunter Canyon was mentioned by many commenters. This planning area does not include Hunter Canyon.

The legal status of the mountain bike trails at the north end of 18 Road was questioned by several commenters. These trails were constructed by local enthusiasts without authorization by BLM. Many of the routes in other parts of the planning area were similarly constructed, or created by repeated travel over time. The significant difference is that the mountain bike trails were subsequently promoted as a public recreational resource by local business. Historically BLM has selectively included existing routes into transportation networks when adopting the designated routes travel management prescription.

User fees have been suggested by some commenters. The option to charge a use fee at the campground is included in the plan.

Comments about the unrestricted access to non riparian washes were often read. The designated route system in the plan includes some washes that have been historically used as routes. Only those washes specifically shown as designated routes will be open to motorized and mechanized travel.

Management of target shooting is an issue that many commented on. The environmental alternative calls for the establishment of designated shooting locations. This may result in this closure to casual shooting in the non designated locations. The final plan suggests that BLM partner with the shooting community to jointly manage target shooting. When a reliable partnership has been established future consideration will be given to recommended shooting locations. No restrictions will be placed on casual shooting.

Benefits of recreation on the local economy is a subject that was mentioned by many of the commenters. Many studies have been done on the impacts of recreation on local economies. A review of these studies reveals that the visitors generating the greatest benefit to local economies are hunters and in descending order of benefit, four wheel drive enthusiasts, followed by snowmobilers, ATV riders, motorcyclists, mountain bikers and hikers.

It was pointed out by a member of the public that no socio-economic analysis is included in the EA. The final version of the EA includes this analysis. The most often read

comments related to the perception of user conflicts and various ways of resolving them. Several people felt that dividing the area into zones was not a good idea, while others insisted on zones and demanded more for one zone and less for another.

The zone concept is contrary to the multiple use mandate of BLM. It may be used sparingly to preserve unique features or manage impacts. It is a poor social engineering tool. The preferred method of preventing the impression of user conflict is to inform and prepare the potential visitor for the experience that is available. The primary cause of user conflict is unmet expectations. (Moore)

The comment that motorized users pay a state OHV registration fee to help support their sport while non motorized users do not pay is true. This is a state issue that BLM can not address.

Seasonal wildlife closures were suggested by several commenters. Seasonal closures are a management tool that will be used in the management of the area.

Addendum to North Fruita Desert Plan Response to Recurring Themes in Comments

Since publication of the Final North Fruita Desert Management Plan, BLM has heard concerns from the public regarding the plan's treatment of the economic impact of recreation. Several reviewers of the Final Plan objected to the following statement on page 78 in the section entitled "Response to Recurring Themes in Comments."

"Benefits of recreation on the local economy is a subject that was mentioned by many of the commenters. Many studies have been done on the impacts of recreation on local economies. A review of these studies reveals that the visitors generating the greatest benefit to local economies are hunters and in descending order of benefit, four wheel drive enthusiasts, followed by snowmobilers, ATV riders, motorcyclists, mountain bikers and hikers."

Plan reviewers argued that this statement was not an accurate description of the situation in the North Fruita Desert and, indeed, it is contradicted by BLM's own economic assessment of recreation in the area. That assessment concludes on page 64 that over 90 percent of the economic impact of recreation in the North Fruita Desert is produced by mountain biking.

While this summary review of studies on the local economic impact of recreation may be correct as a broad-brush description of recreation throughout the western United States, it does not accurately reflect the experience of many local economies, including that of Fruita and western Mesa County. The statement was written at an early stage in the development of the plan before BLM had prepared a socioeconomic assessment for the area. Inclusion of the statement in the final plan document was inadvertent. In its place, BLM should have included the following:

"Benefits of recreation on the local economy is a subject that was mentioned by many of the commenters. In light of these comments, BLM prepared a socioeconomic assessment of recreation activity in the North Fruita Desert. That assessment concluded that recreation-based tourism was becoming increasingly important to the Mesa County economy, that mountain biking was an important element of recreation-based tourism, and that mountain biking produced over 90 percent of the economic impact of recreation activity in the North Fruita Desert."

Other plan reviewers wondered about the scale of the economic impacts described in the plan, questioning whether BLM had not in fact underestimated the impacts. BLM stands by its estimates. They were based on physical counts of visitor use in the North Fruita Desert, recent user expenditure data from the Fruita area, and an economic input-output study done only the year before in the Colorado Canyons NCA by the U.S. Geological Survey. However, a further description of the way economic impacts are calculated may provide a better context for understanding the impacts.

Change in a local economy is brought about by the introduction of new money into that economy. This can occur in many ways – by the establishment of a new manufacturing plant, by people moving into the area, by a government project, or as in the Fruita area, by a growth in tourism – but it must be the result of money from outside the economy flowing in. An increase in expenditures by local residents in any economic activity doesn't necessarily result in economic growth because the likelihood is that the expenditures have simply shifted from some other activity. Expenditures by tourists are by definition new to the economy and thus produce an impact. In terms of the North Fruita Desert, many local residents recreate there and spend money in Fruita and Mesa County. However, the economic growth associated with recreation there is caused by non-residents who come to the area and purchase goods and services.

The degree of the impact has much to do with whether the expenditures by outsiders stay in the area. Purchase of an all-expenses paid river rafting trip by tourists may actually have little impact if the provider of the trip is based outside the area and buys all his equipment and supplies outside the area. On the other hand, the same trip could have great impact if the provider is local and purchases all equipment and supplies locally. An example of this phenomenon would be the purchase of a kayak by a visitor to the area from a Grand Junction vendor. A kayak would represent a significant expenditure, perhaps \$1000 or more. However, if the kayak was manufactured elsewhere, the greatest part of this expenditure, say \$600, would already have been paid by the vendor to a business outside the local economy, and thus would not produce any impact. Other payments by the kayak seller to businesses outside the area – a rental or mortgage payment, interest payments, advertising expenses – would further diminish the local impact. The total immediate local impact of the \$1000 expenditure for a kayak could possibly be as little as \$150.

The BLM assessment of the economic effects of recreation in the North Fruita Desert concluded that although the effects were “small relative to the entire economy of Mesa County, they are important nonetheless since they are part of the matrix of outdoor recreation and scenic resources that draw tourists to the area. Moreover, an increasing number of the jobs and much of the income are likely going to residents and businesses located in Fruita and western Mesa County where their impact may bear more weight.” In addition, BLM's assessment indicated that those effects would continue to grow.

North Fruita Desert Plan-Map 1

Land Status:

- BLM
- State
- Private

Boundaries:

- North Fruita Desert Planning Area Boundary
- Designated Open OHV Area
- Bicycle Emphasis Area (No Shooting)
- Non-Motorized
- Designated Campground

Roads and Trails:

- County Roads
- Designated Two-Track
- Designated Single-Track
- Closed Two-Track
- Closed Single-Track
- Administrative Routes
- New Construction

Other:

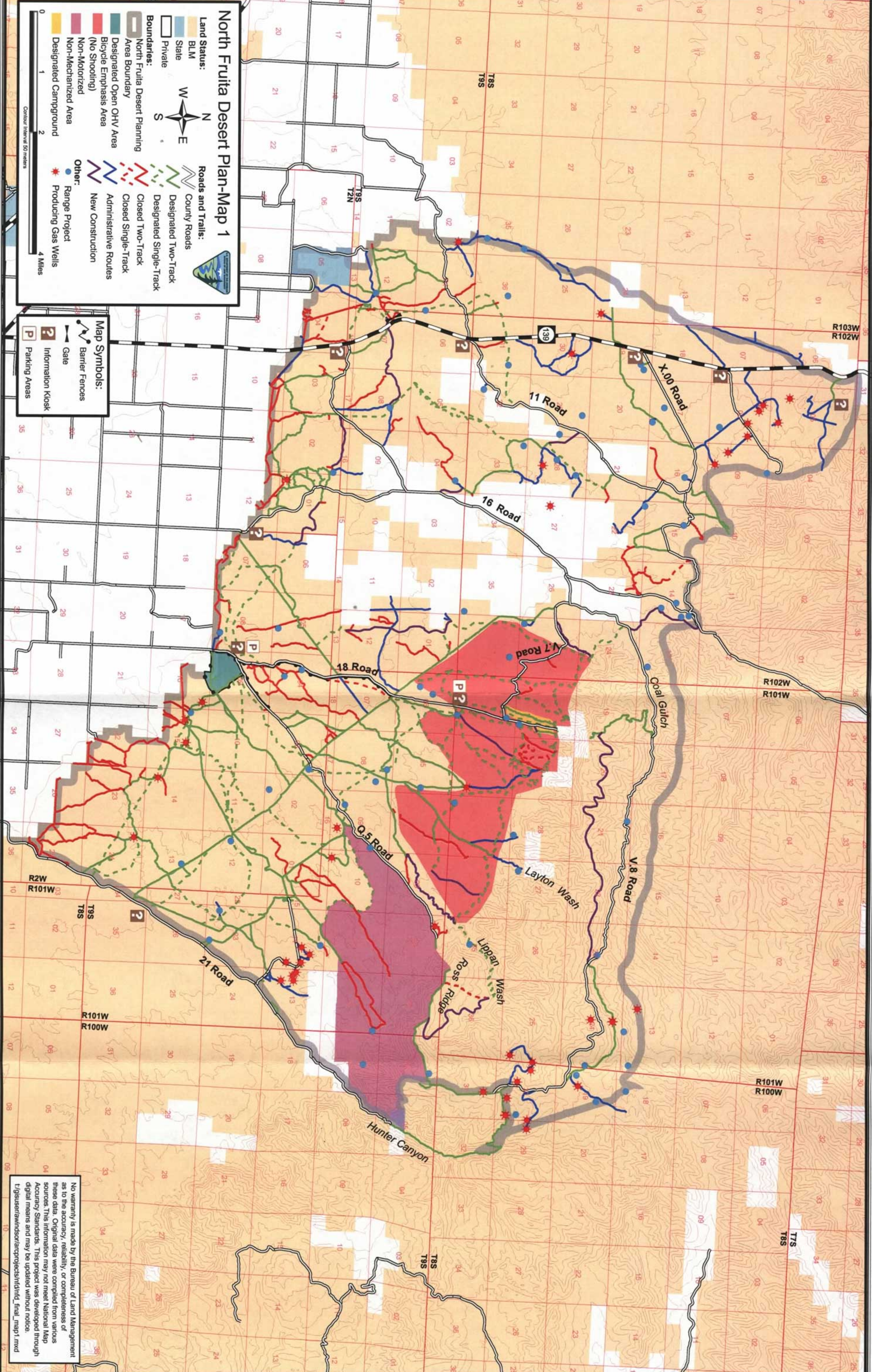
- Range Project
- Producing Gas Wells

Map Symbols:

- Barrier Fences
- Gate
- Information Kiosk
- Parking Areas

0 1 2 4 Miles

Contour Interval 50 meters



No warranty is made by the Bureau of Land Management as to the accuracy, reliability, or completeness of these data. Original data were compiled from various sources. This information may not meet National Map Accuracy Standards. This project was developed through digital means and may be updated without notice.
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North Fruita Desert Plan-Map 2



- Land Status:**
- BLM
 - State
 - Private

- Boundaries:**
- North Fruita Desert Planning Area Boundary
 - Designated Open OHV Area
 - Bicycle Emphasis Area (No Shooting)
 - Non-Motorized
 - Non-Mechanized Area
 - Designated Campground
 - No New Trail Development

- Roads and Trails:**
- County Roads
 - Designated Two-Track
 - Designated Single-Track
 - Administrative Routes
 - New Construction
 - Seasonal Closures

- Other:**
- Range Project
 - Producing Gas Wells

- Map Symbols:**
- Barrier Fences
 - Gate
 - Information Kiosk
 - Parking Areas



No warranty is made by the Bureau of Land Management as to the accuracy, reliability, or completeness of these data. Original data were compiled from various sources. This information may not meet National Map Accuracy Standards. This project was developed through digital means and may be updated without notice.
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